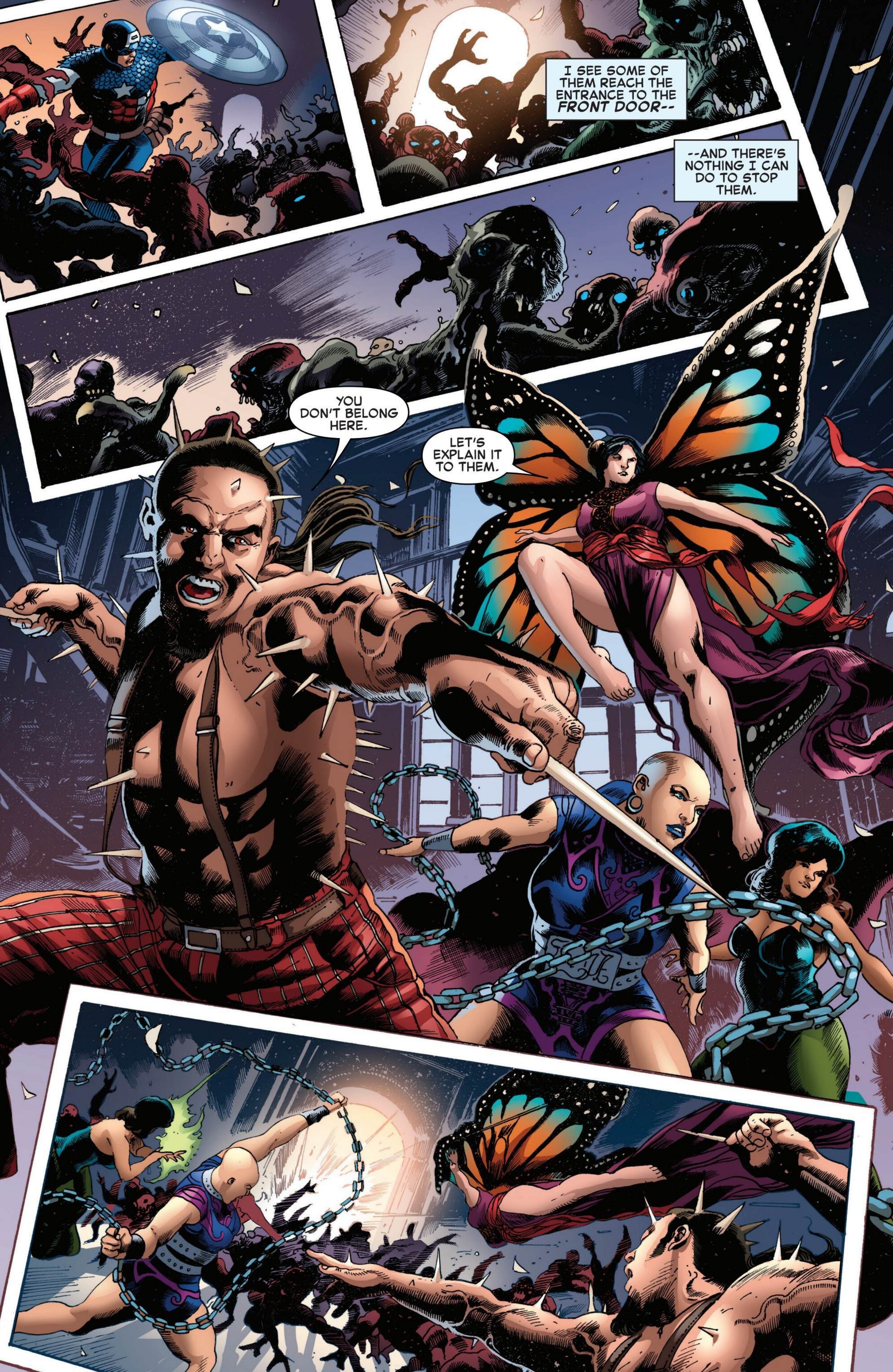
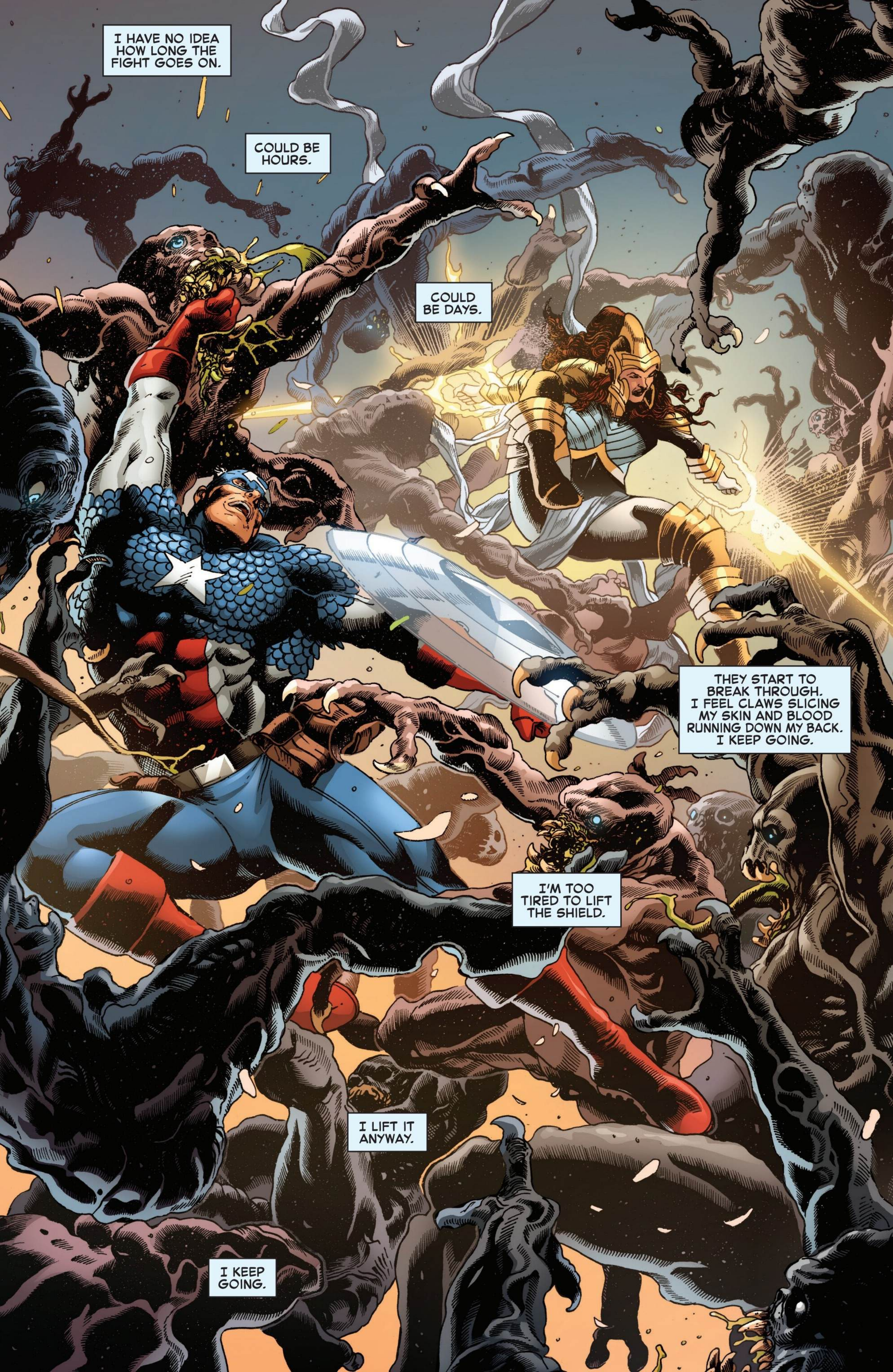
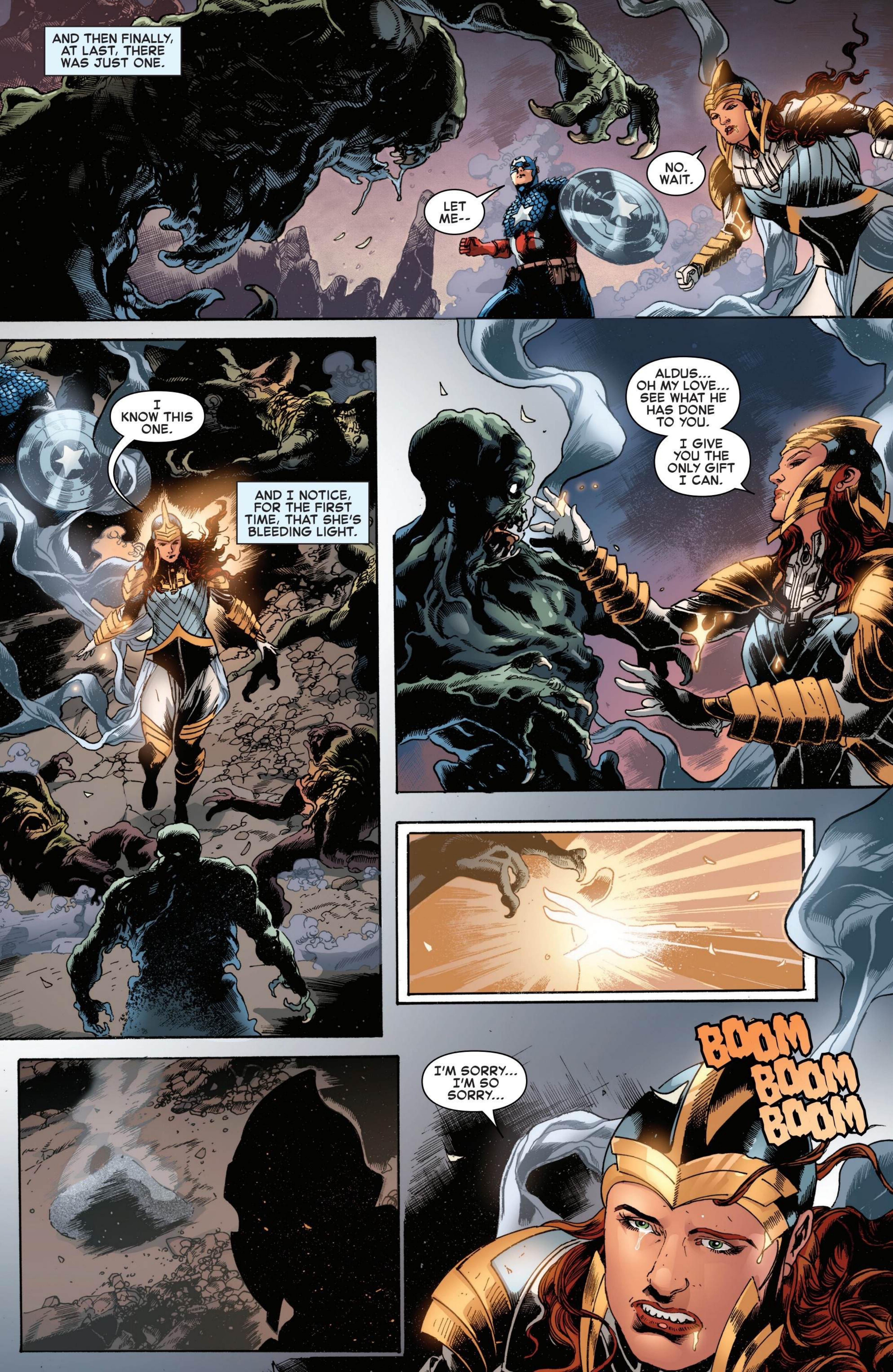
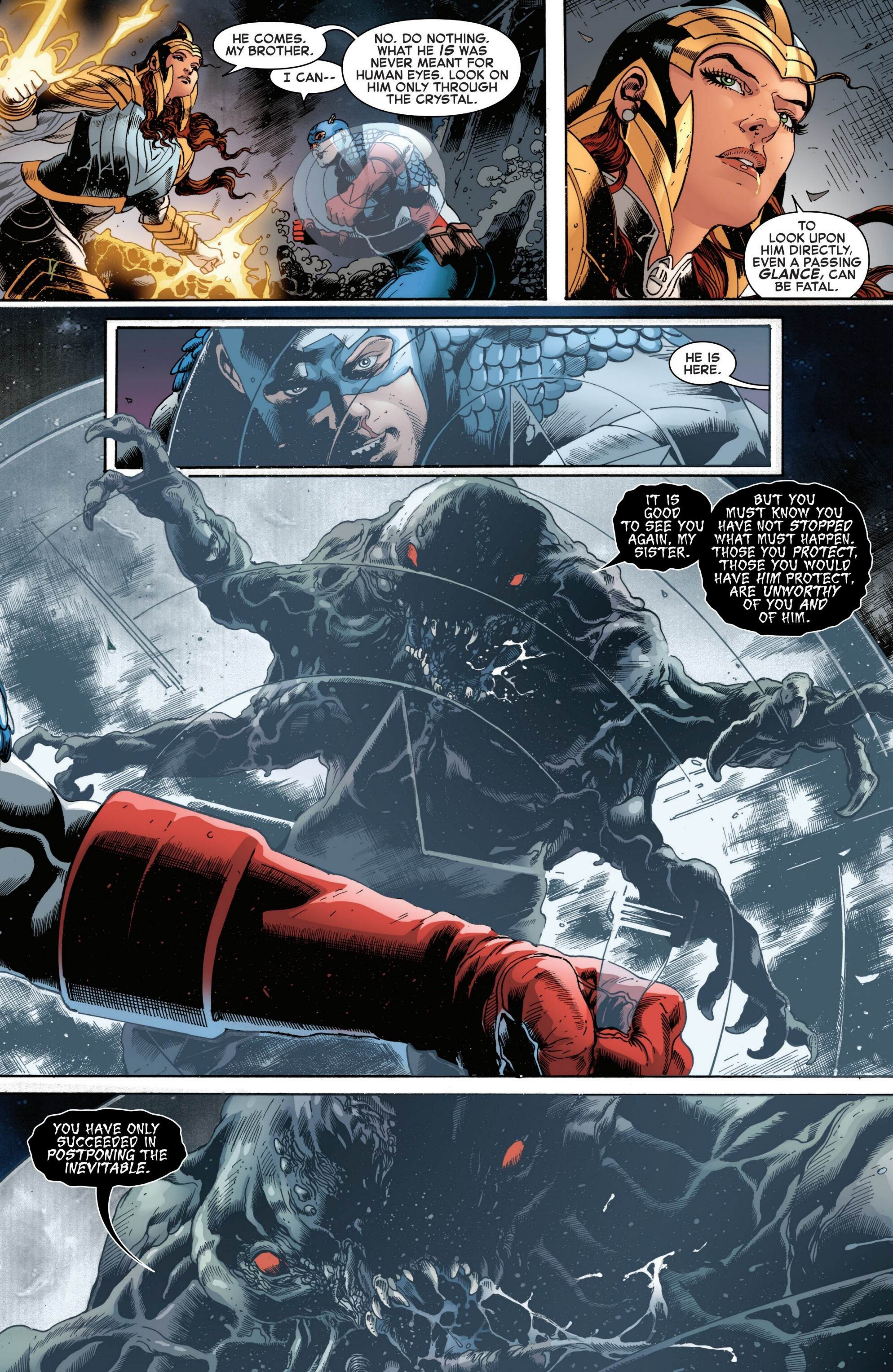
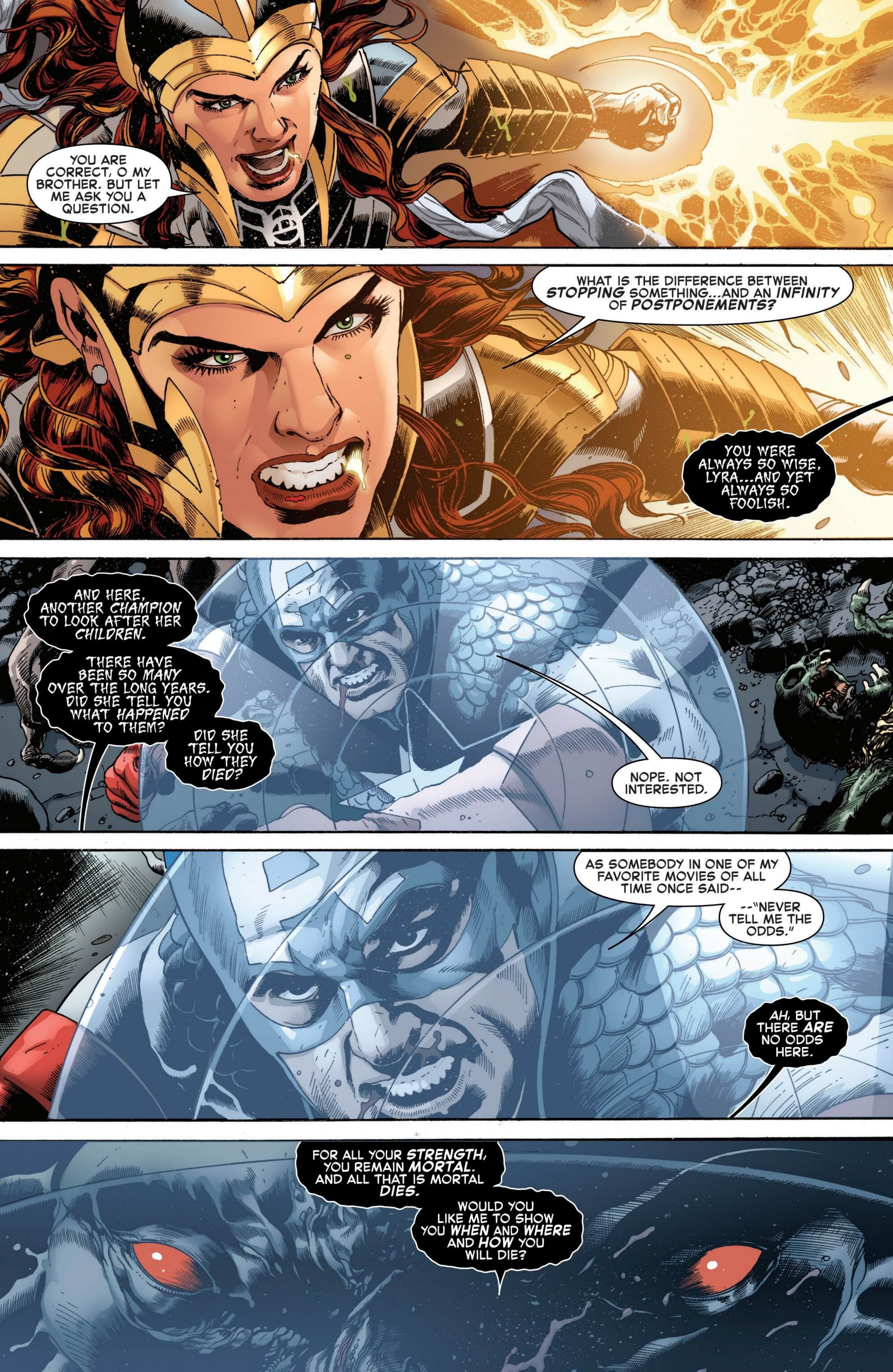
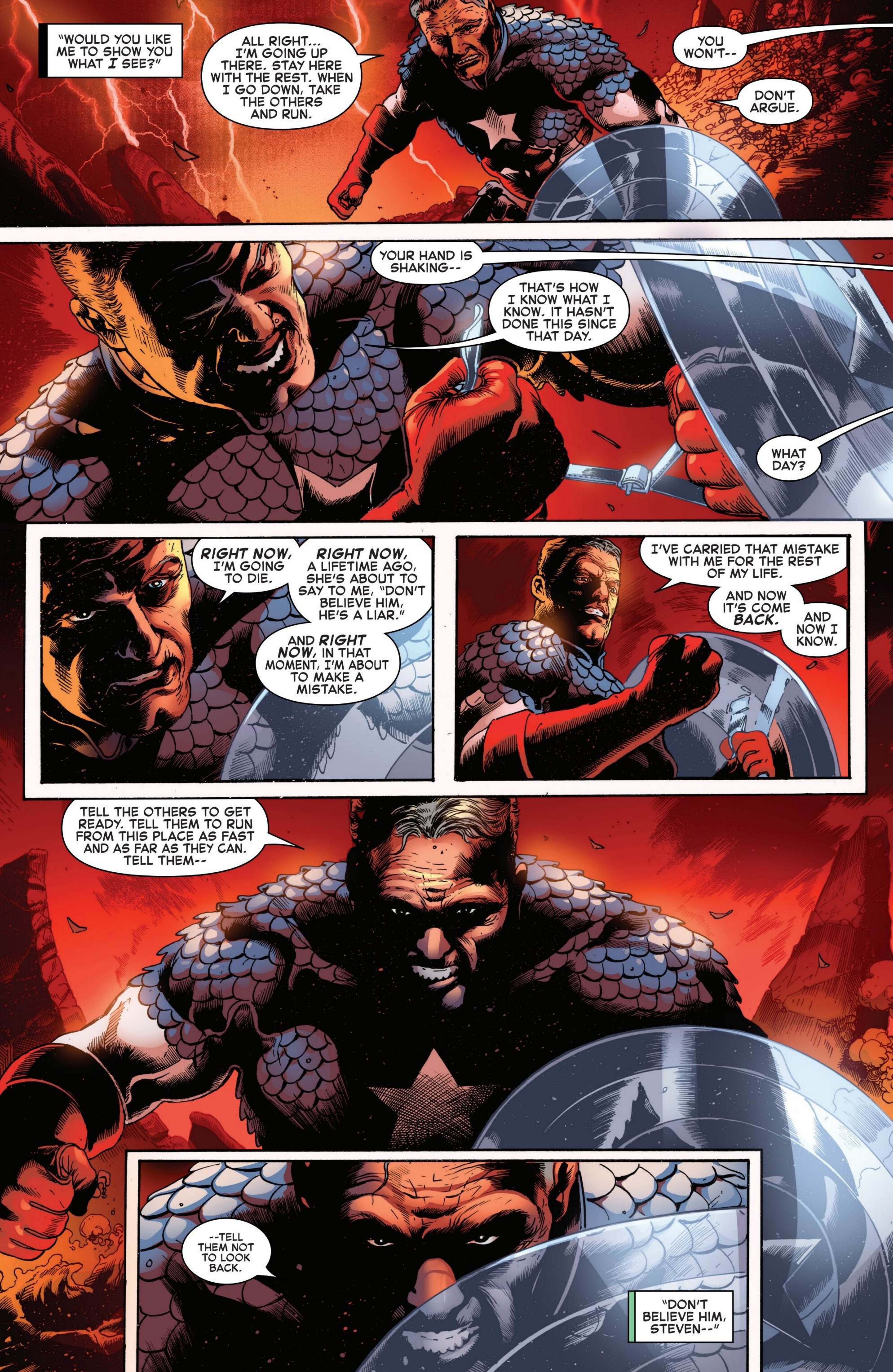

I SEE SOME OF THEM REACH THE ENTRANCE TO THE *FRONT DOOR--*
--AND THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO TO STOP THEM.
YOU DON'T BELONG HERE.
LET'S EXPLAIN IT TO THEM.

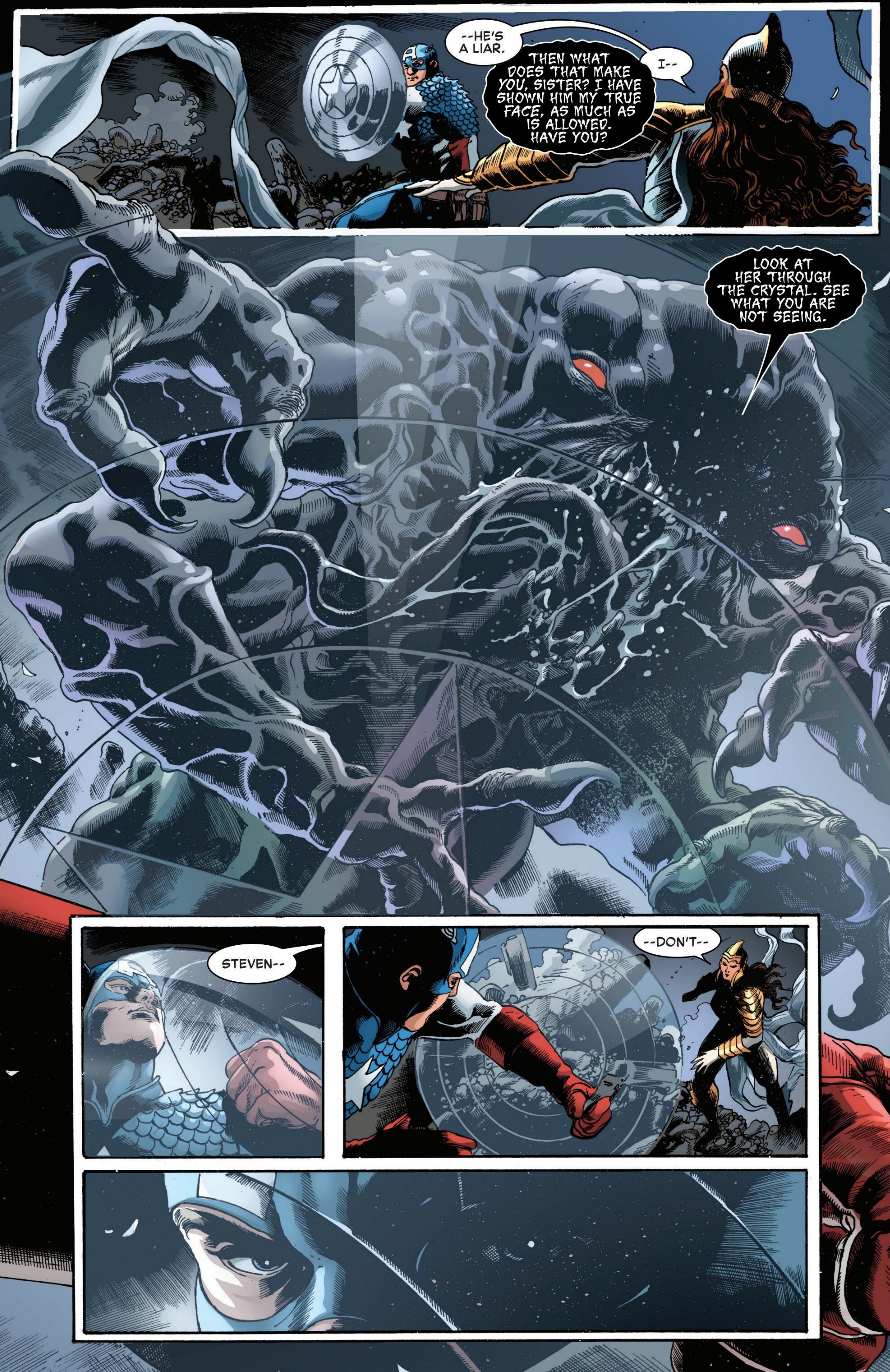

I HAVE NO IDEA HOW LONG THE FIGHT GOES ON.
COULD BE HOURS.
COULD BE DAYS.
THEY START TO BREAK THROUGH. I FEEL CLAWS SLICING MY SKIN AND BLOOD RUNNING DOWN MY BACK. I KEEP GOING.
I'M TOO TIRED TO LIFT THE SHIELD.
I LIFT IT ANYWAY.
I KEEP GOING.

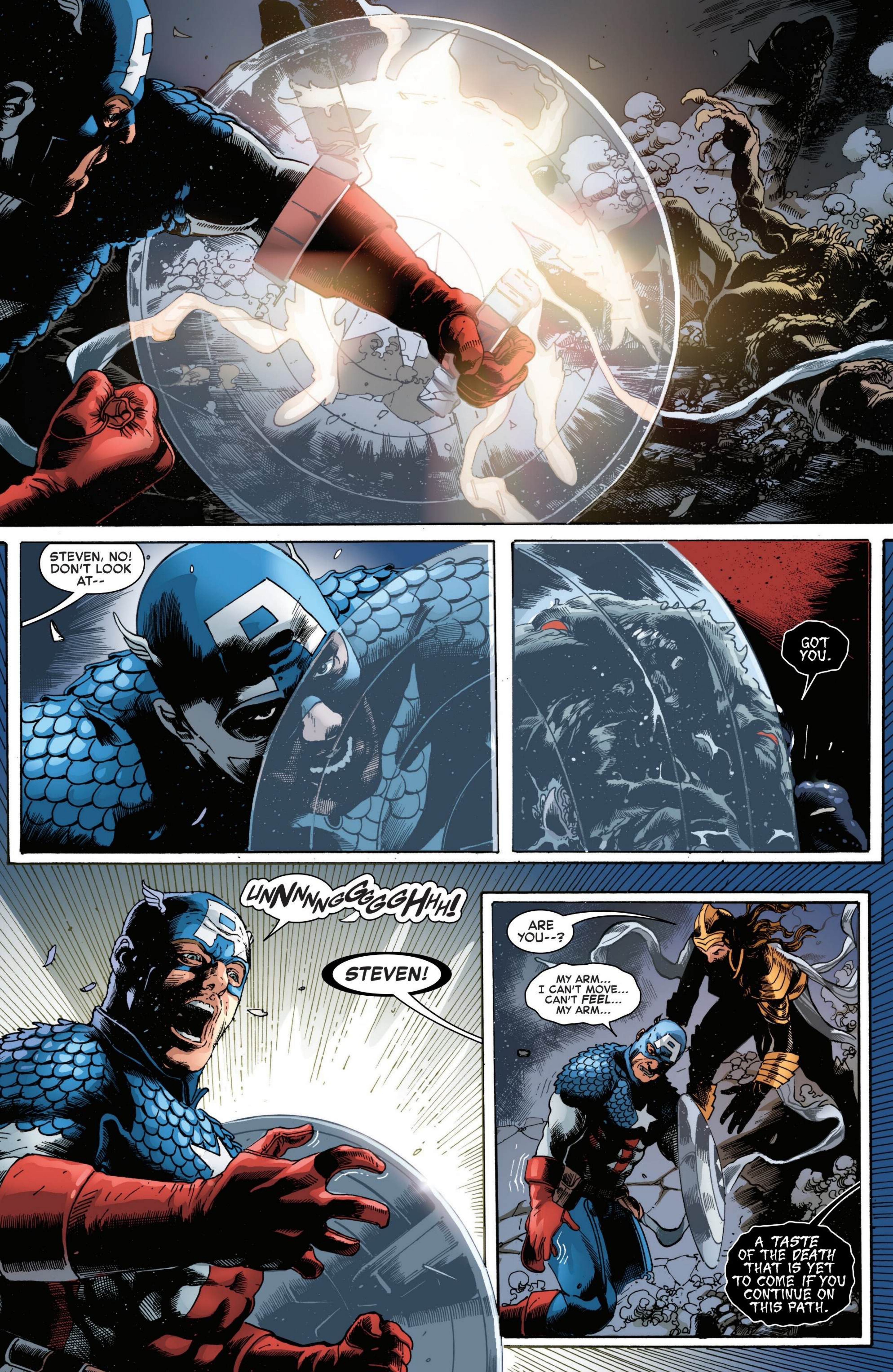

AND THEN FINALLY, AT LAST, THERE WAS JUST ONE.
LET ME--
NO. WAIT.
I KNOW THIS ONE.
AND I NOTICE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THAT SHE'S BLEEDING LIGHT.
ALDUS... OH MY LOVE... SEE WHAT HE HAS DONE TO YOU.
I GIVE YOU THE ONLY GIFT I CAN.
BOOM BOOM BOOM
I'M SORRY... I'M SO SORRY...

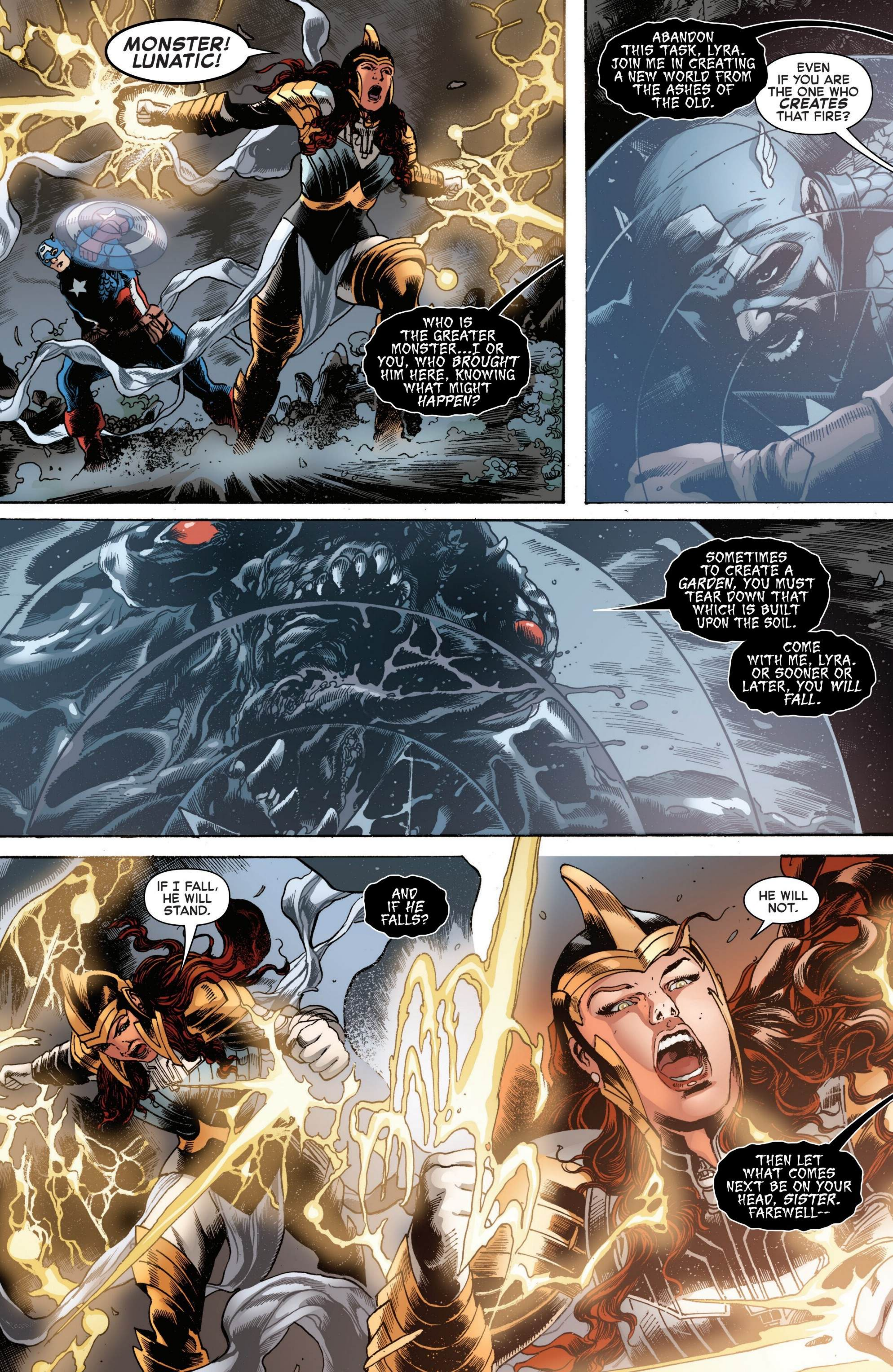

HE COMES. MY BROTHER.
I CAN--
NO. DO NOTHING. WHAT HE *IS* WAS NEVER MEANT FOR HUMAN EYES. LOOK ON HIM ONLY THROUGH THE CRYSTAL.
TO LOOK UPON HIM DIRECTLY, EVEN A PASSING *GLANCE*, CAN BE FATAL.
HE IS HERE.
IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, MY SISTER.
BUT YOU MUST KNOW YOU HAVE NOT *STOPPED* WHAT MUST HAPPEN. THOSE YOU *PROTECT*, THOSE YOU WOULD HAVE *HIM* PROTECT, ARE *UNWORTHY* OF YOU *AND* OF HIM.
YOU HAVE ONLY SUCCEEDED IN POSTPONING THE INEVITABLE.

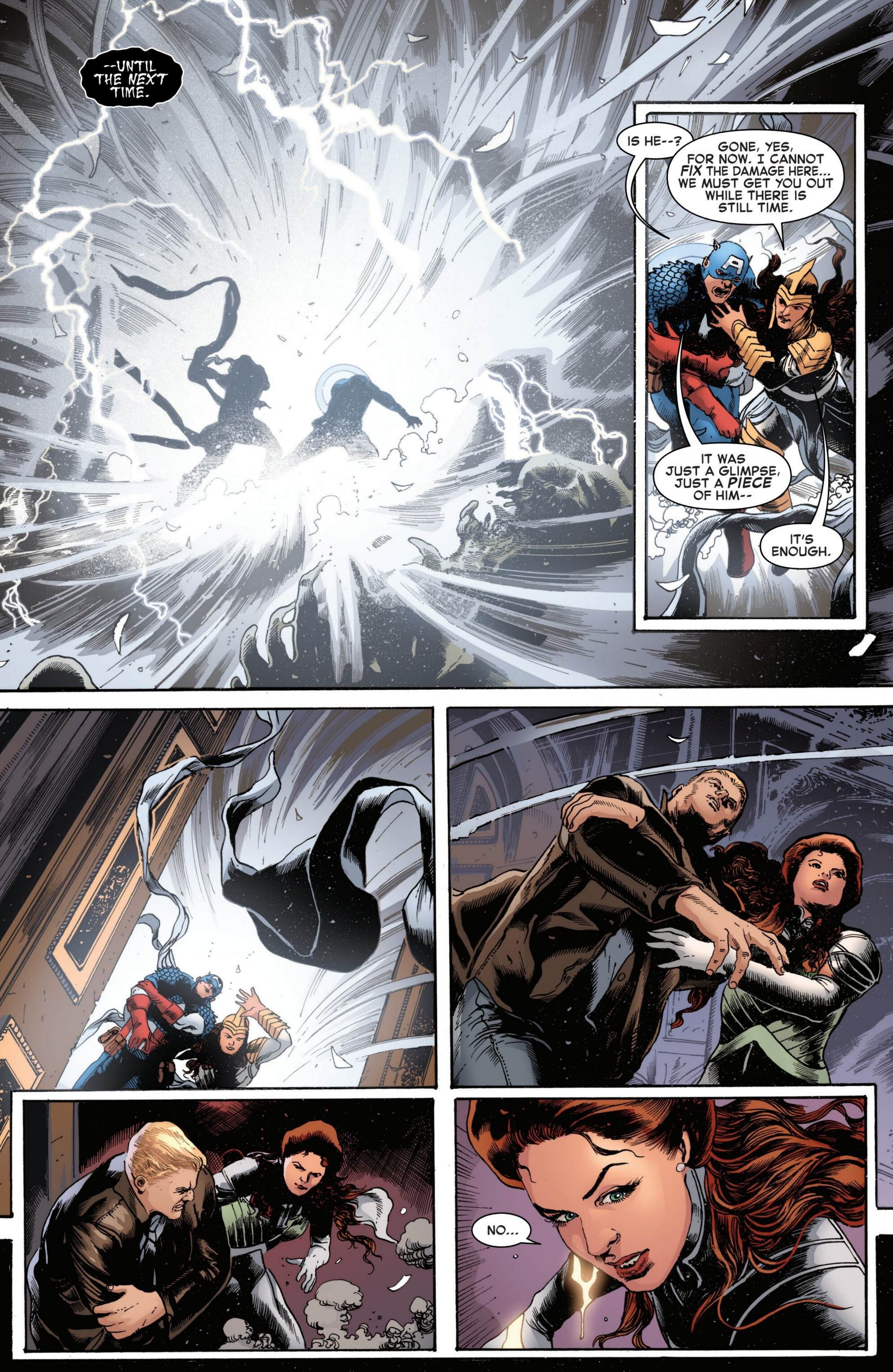

YOU ARE CORRECT, O MY BROTHER. BUT LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION.
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *STOPPING* SOMETHING...AND AN *INFINITY* OF *POSTPONEMENTS?*
YOU WERE ALWAYS SO WISE, LYRA...AND YET ALWAYS SO FOOLISH.
AND HERE, ANOTHER *CHAMPION* TO LOOK AFTER HER *CHILDREN.*
THERE HAVE BEEN SO *MANY* OVER THE LONG YEARS. DID SHE TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?
DID SHE TELL YOU HOW THEY DIED?
NOPE. NOT INTERESTED.
AS SOMEBODY IN ONE OF MY FAVORITE MOVIES OF ALL TIME ONCE SAID--
--"NEVER TELL ME THE ODDS."
AH, BUT THERE *ARE* NO ODDS HERE.
FOR ALL YOUR *STRENGTH,* YOU REMAIN *MORTAL.* AND ALL THAT IS MORTAL *DIES.*
WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO SHOW YOU *WHEN* AND *WHERE* AND *HOW* YOU WILL DIE?

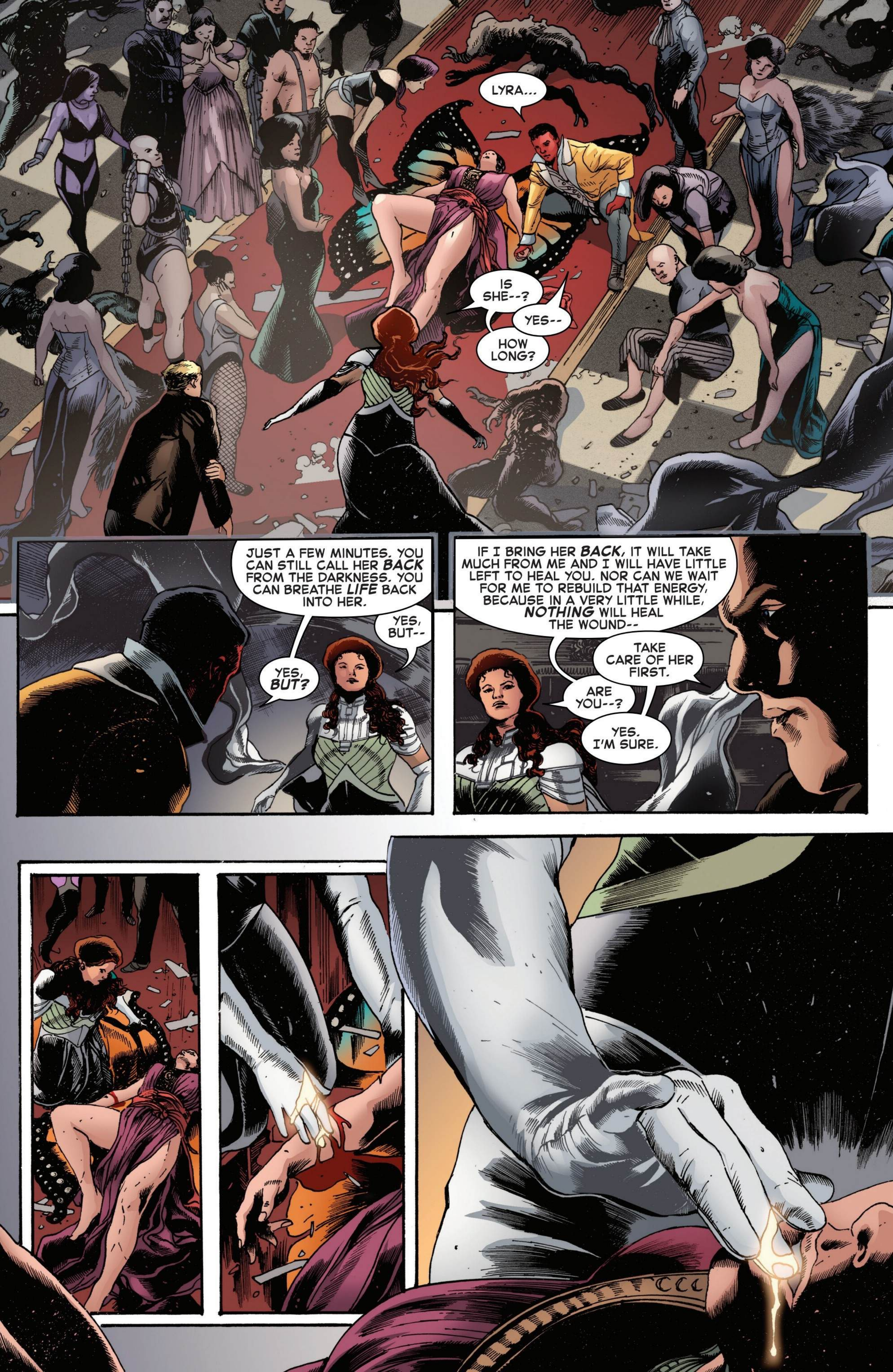

"WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO SHOW YOU WHAT *I* SEE?"
ALL RIGHT... I'M GOING UP THERE. STAY HERE WITH THE REST. WHEN I GO DOWN, TAKE THE OTHERS AND RUN.
YOU WON'T--
DON'T ARGUE.
YOUR HAND IS SHAKING--
THAT'S HOW I KNOW WHAT I KNOW. IT HASN'T DONE THIS SINCE THAT DAY.
WHAT DAY?
RIGHT NOW, I'M GOING TO DIE.
RIGHT NOW, A LIFETIME AGO, SHE'S ABOUT TO SAY TO ME, "DON'T BELIEVE HIM, HE'S A LIAR."
AND *RIGHT NOW,* IN THAT MOMENT, I'M ABOUT TO MAKE A MISTAKE.
I'VE CARRIED THAT MISTAKE WITH ME FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE.
AND NOW IT'S COME *BACK.*
AND NOW I KNOW.
TELL THE OTHERS TO GET READY. TELL THEM TO RUN FROM THIS PLACE AS FAST AND AS FAR AS THEY CAN. TELL THEM--
--TELL THEM NOT TO LOOK BACK.
"DON'T BELIEVE HIM, STEVEN--"

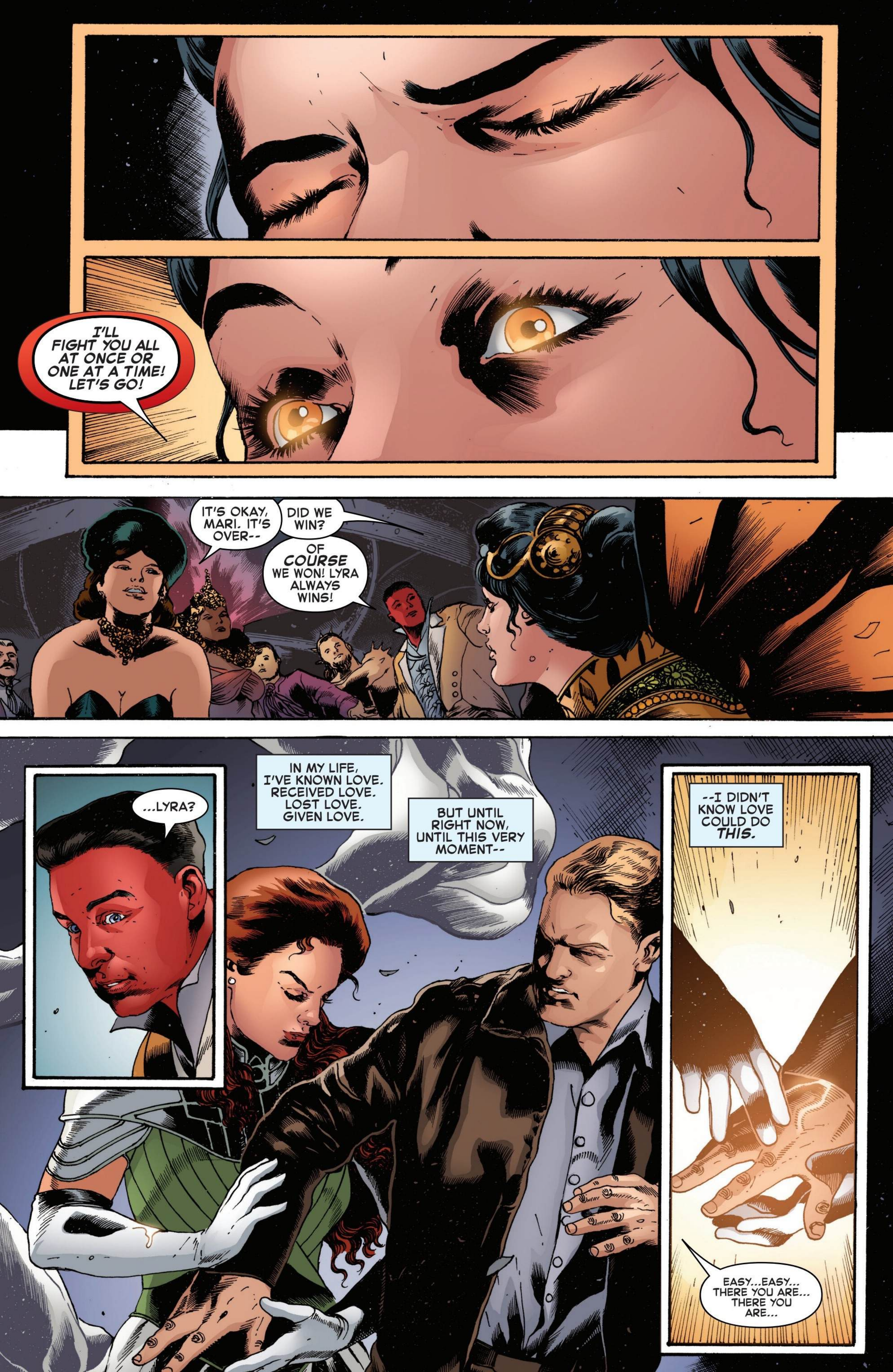

--HE'S A LIAR.
I--
THEN WHAT DOES THAT MAKE YOU, SISTER? I HAVE SHOWN HIM MY TRUE FACE, AS MUCH AS IS ALLOWED. HAVE YOU?
LOOK AT HER THROUGH THE CRYSTAL. SEE WHAT YOU ARE NOT SEEING.
STEVEN--
--DON'T--

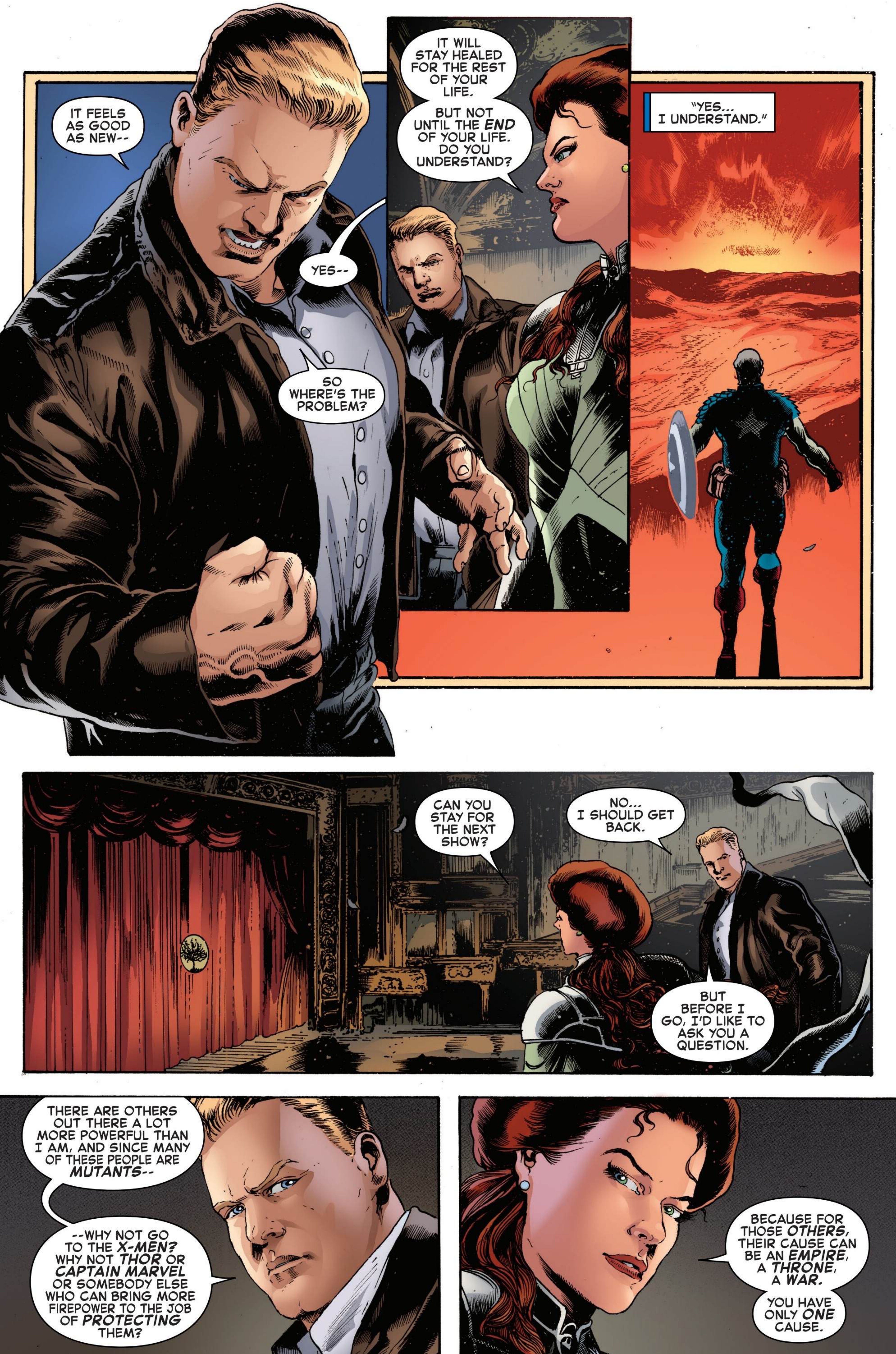

STEVEN, NO! DON'T LOOK AT--
GOT YOU.
UNNNNGGGGHHH!
STEVEN!
ARE YOU--?
MY ARM... I CAN'T MOVE... CAN'T FEEL... MY ARM...
A TASTE OF THE DEATH THAT IS YET TO COME IF YOU CONTINUE ON THIS PATH.

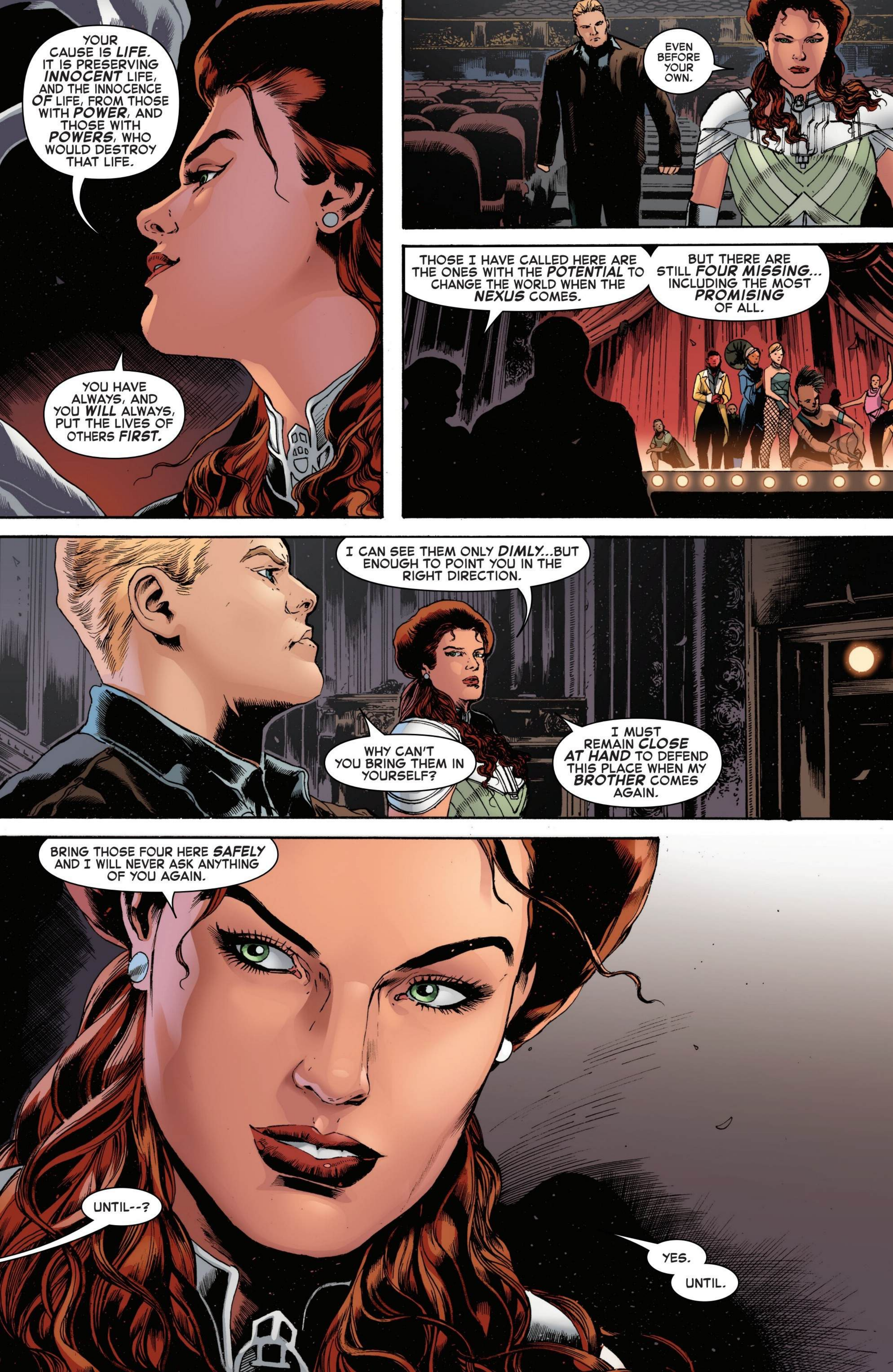

MONSTER! LUNATIC!
WHO IS THE GREATER MONSTER...I OR YOU, WHO BROUGHT HIM HERE, KNOWING WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN?
ABANDON THIS TASK, LYRA. JOIN ME IN CREATING A NEW WORLD FROM THE ASHES OF THE OLD.
EVEN IF YOU ARE THE ONE WHO *CREATES* THAT FIRE?
SOMETIMES TO CREATE A *GARDEN*, YOU MUST TEAR DOWN THAT WHICH IS BUILT UPON THE SOIL.
COME WITH ME, LYRA. OR SOONER OR LATER, YOU *WILL* *FALL*.
IF I FALL, HE WILL STAND.
AND IF *HE* FALLS?
HE WILL NOT.
THEN LET WHAT COMES NEXT BE ON YOUR HEAD, SISTER. FAREWELL--

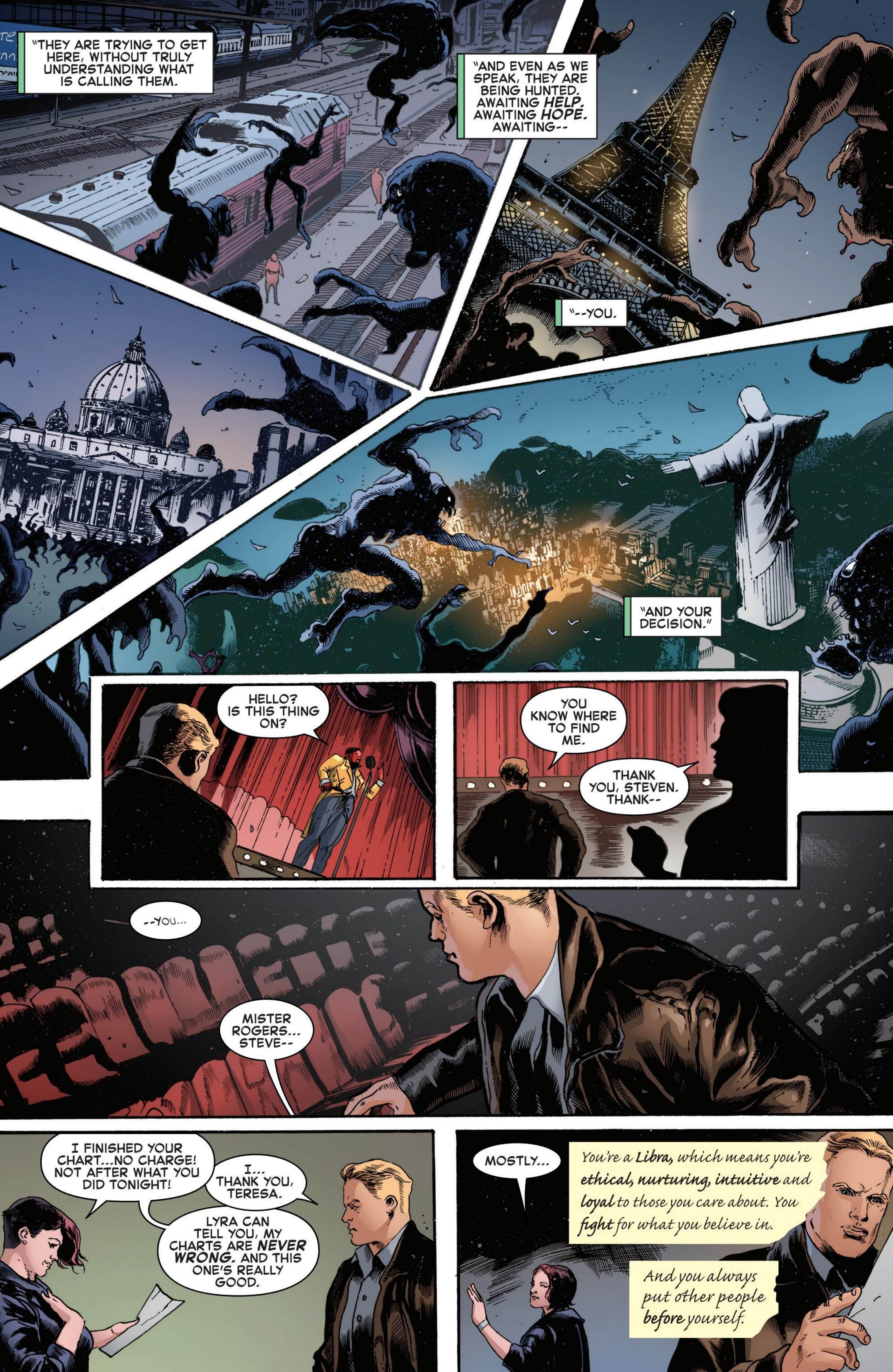

--UNTIL THE *NEXT* TIME.
IS HE--?
GONE, YES, FOR NOW. I CANNOT *FIX* THE DAMAGE HERE... WE MUST GET YOU OUT WHILE THERE IS STILL TIME.
IT WAS JUST A GLIMPSE, JUST A *PIECE* OF HIM--
IT'S ENOUGH.
NO...

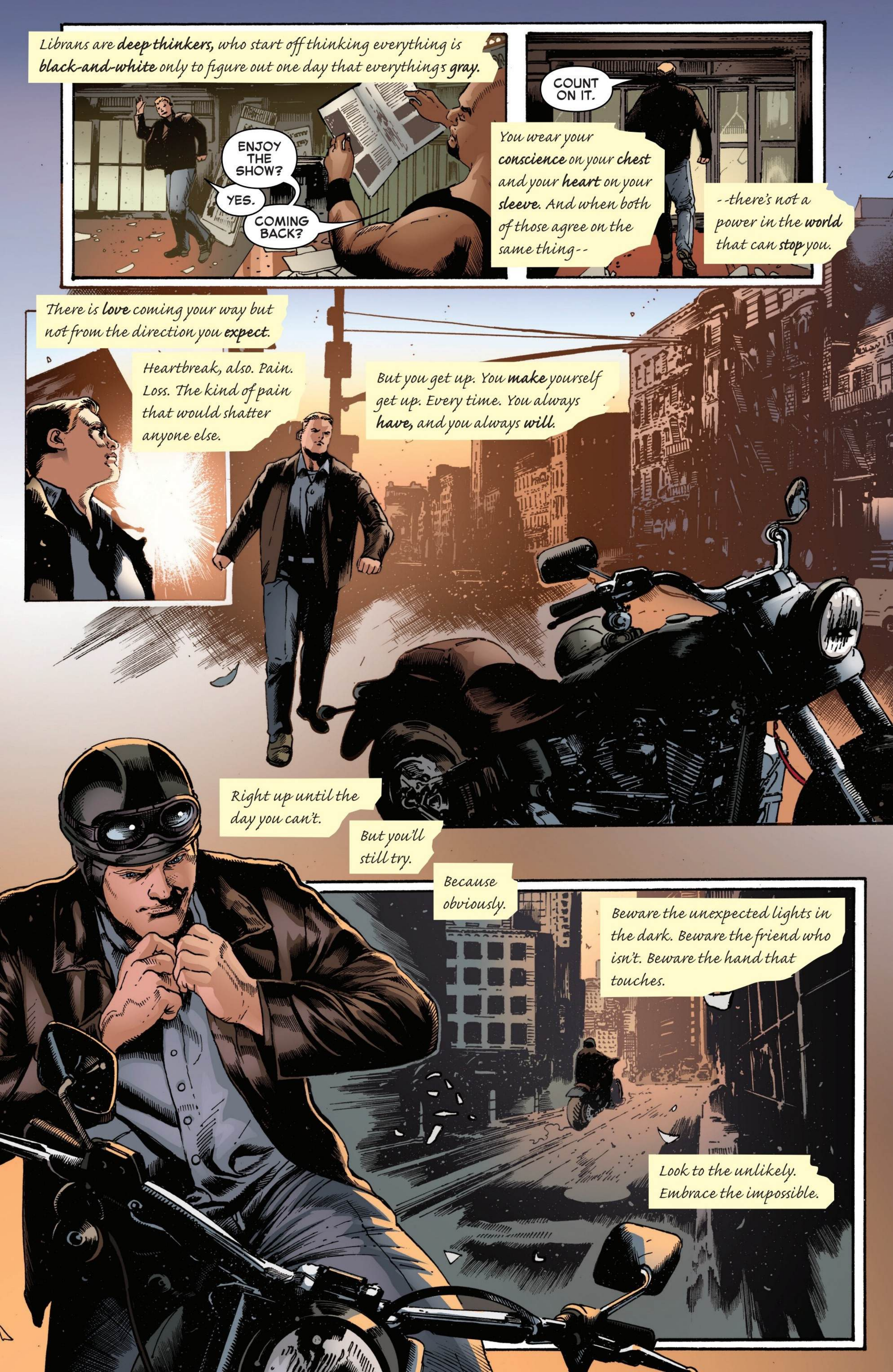

LYRA...
IS SHE--?
YES--
HOW LONG?
JUST A FEW MINUTES. YOU CAN STILL CALL HER **BACK** FROM THE DARKNESS. YOU CAN BREATHE **LIFE** BACK INTO HER.
YES, BUT--
YES, **BUT?**
IF I BRING HER **BACK,** IT WILL TAKE MUCH FROM ME AND I WILL HAVE LITTLE LEFT TO HEAL YOU. NOR CAN WE WAIT FOR ME TO REBUILD THAT ENERGY, BECAUSE IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, **NOTHING** WILL HEAL THE WOUND--
TAKE CARE OF HER FIRST.
ARE YOU--?
YES. I'M SURE.

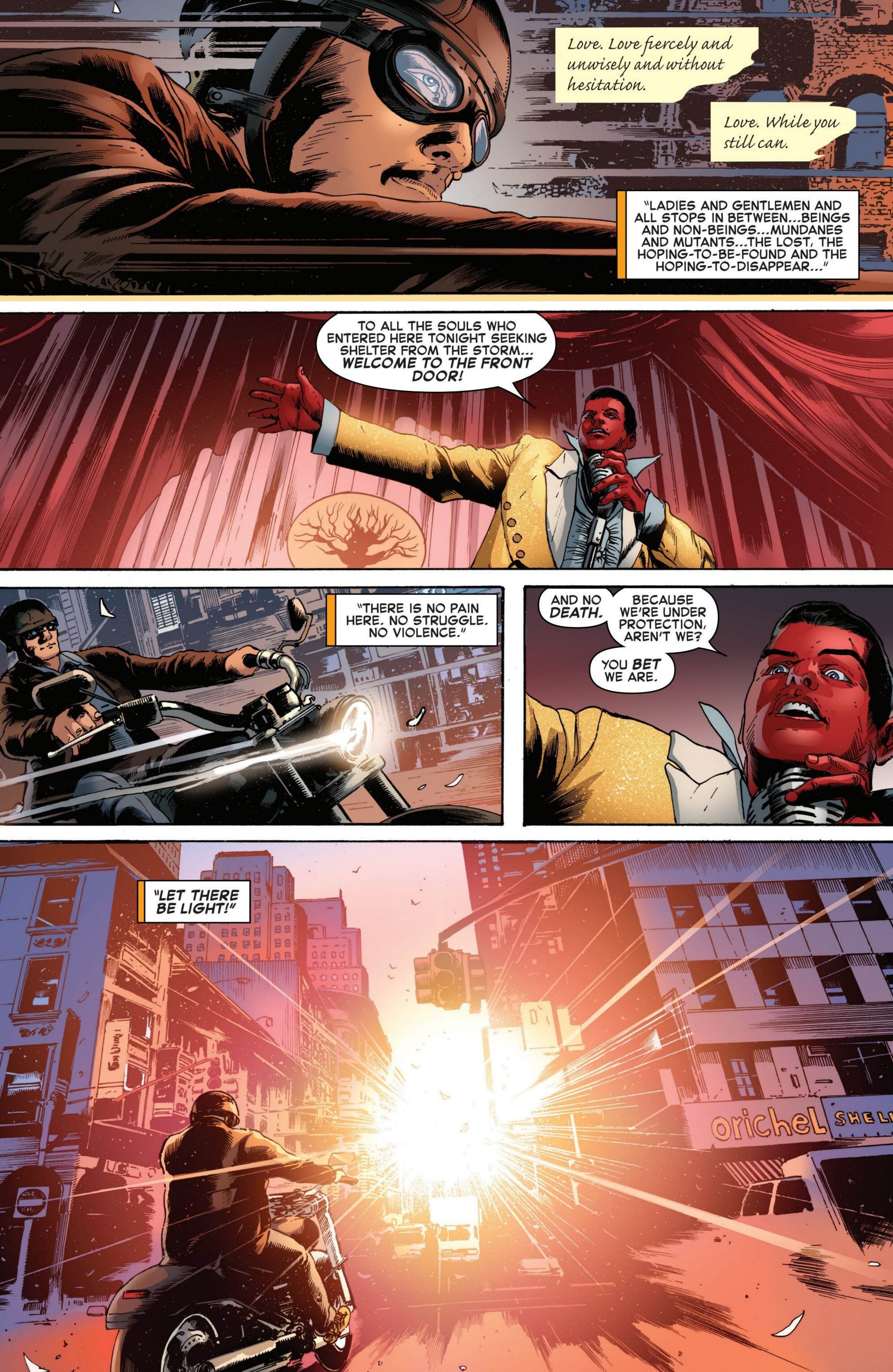

I'LL FIGHT YOU ALL AT ONCE OR ONE AT A TIME! LET'S GO!
IT'S OKAY, MARI. IT'S OVER--
DID WE WIN?
OF *COURSE* WE WON! LYRA ALWAYS WINS!
...LYRA?
IN MY LIFE, I'VE KNOWN LOVE. RECEIVED LOVE. LOST LOVE. GIVEN LOVE.
BUT UNTIL RIGHT NOW, UNTIL THIS VERY MOMENT--
--I DIDN'T KNOW LOVE COULD DO *THIS.*
EASY...EASY... THERE YOU ARE... THERE YOU ARE...

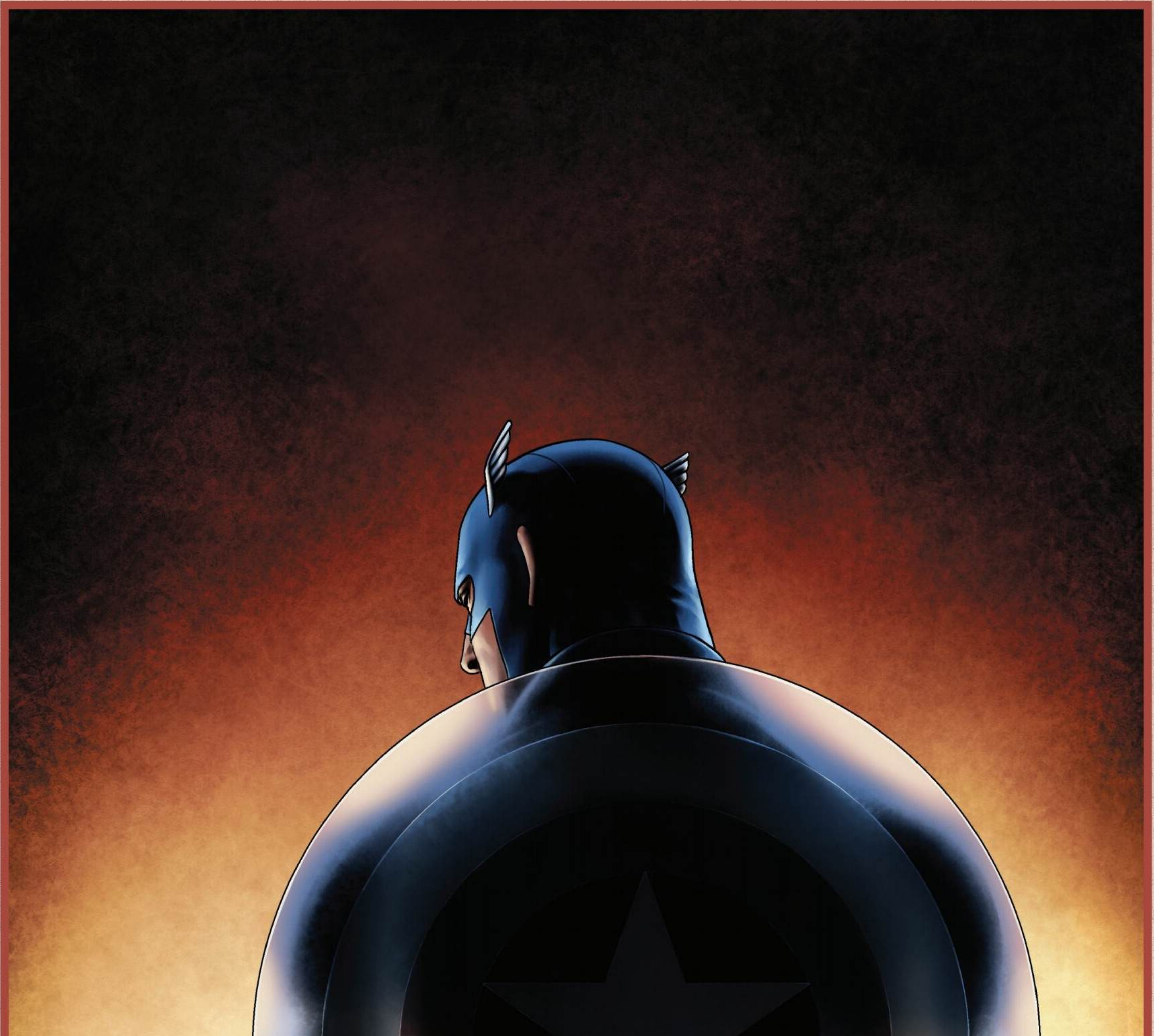

IT FEELS AS GOOD AS NEW--
IT WILL STAY HEALED FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
BUT NOT UNTIL THE *END* OF YOUR LIFE. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
YES--
"YES... I UNDERSTAND."
SO WHERE'S THE PROBLEM?
CAN YOU STAY FOR THE NEXT SHOW?
NO... I SHOULD GET BACK.
BUT BEFORE I GO, I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A QUESTION.
THERE ARE OTHERS OUT THERE A LOT MORE POWERFUL THAN I AM, AND SINCE MANY OF THESE PEOPLE ARE *MUTANTS*--
--WHY NOT GO TO THE *X-MEN?* WHY NOT *THOR* OR *CAPTAIN MARVEL* OR SOMEBODY ELSE WHO CAN BRING MORE FIREPOWER TO THE JOB OF *PROTECTING* THEM?
BECAUSE FOR THOSE *OTHERS*, THEIR CAUSE CAN BE AN *EMPIRE*, A *THRONE*, A *WAR.*
YOU HAVE ONLY *ONE* CAUSE.


YOUR CAUSE IS LIFE. IT IS PRESERVING INNOCENT LIFE, AND THE INNOCENCE OF LIFE, FROM THOSE WITH POWER, AND THOSE WITH POWERS, WHO WOULD DESTROY THAT LIFE.
YOU HAVE ALWAYS, AND YOU WILL ALWAYS, PUT THE LIVES OF OTHERS FIRST.
EVEN BEFORE YOUR OWN.
THOSE I HAVE CALLED HERE ARE THE ONES WITH THE POTENTIAL TO CHANGE THE WORLD WHEN THE NEXUS COMES.
BUT THERE ARE STILL FOUR MISSING... INCLUDING THE MOST PROMISING OF ALL.
I CAN SEE THEM ONLY DIMLY...BUT ENOUGH TO POINT YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.
WHY CAN'T YOU BRING THEM IN YOURSELF?
I MUST REMAIN CLOSE AT HAND TO DEFEND THIS PLACE WHEN MY BROTHER COMES AGAIN.
BRING THOSE FOUR HERE SAFELY AND I WILL NEVER ASK ANYTHING OF YOU AGAIN.
UNTIL--?
YES.
UNTIL.


"THEY ARE TRYING TO GET HERE, WITHOUT TRULY UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS CALLING THEM.
"AND EVEN AS WE SPEAK, THEY ARE BEING HUNTED. AWAITING HELP. AWAITING HOPE. AWAITING--
"--YOU.
"AND YOUR DECISION."
HELLO? IS THIS THING ON?
YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND ME.
THANK YOU, STEVEN. THANK--
--YOU...
MISTER ROGERS... STEVE--
I FINISHED YOUR CHART...NO CHARGE! NOT AFTER WHAT YOU DID TONIGHT!
I... THANK YOU, TERESA.
LYRA CAN TELL YOU, MY CHARTS ARE NEVER WRONG. AND THIS ONE'S REALLY GOOD.
MOSTLY...
You're a Libra, which means you're ethical, nurturing, intuitive and loyal to those you care about. You fight for what you believe in.
And you always put other people before yourself.


Librans are **deep thinkers,** who start off thinking everything is **black-and-white** only to figure out one day that everything's **gray.**
ENJOY THE SHOW?
YES.
COMING BACK?
COUNT ON IT.
You wear your **conscience** on your **chest** and your **heart** on your **sleeve.** And when both of those agree on the same thing--
--there's not a power in the **world** that can **stop** you.
There is **love** coming your way but not from the direction you **expect.**
Heartbreak, also. Pain. Loss. The kind of pain that would shatter anyone else.
But you get up. You **make** yourself get up. Every time. You always **have,** and you always **will.**
Right up until the day you can't.
But you'll still try.
Because obviously.
Beware the unexpected lights in the dark. Beware the friend who isn't. Beware the hand that touches.
Look to the unlikely. Embrace the impossible.

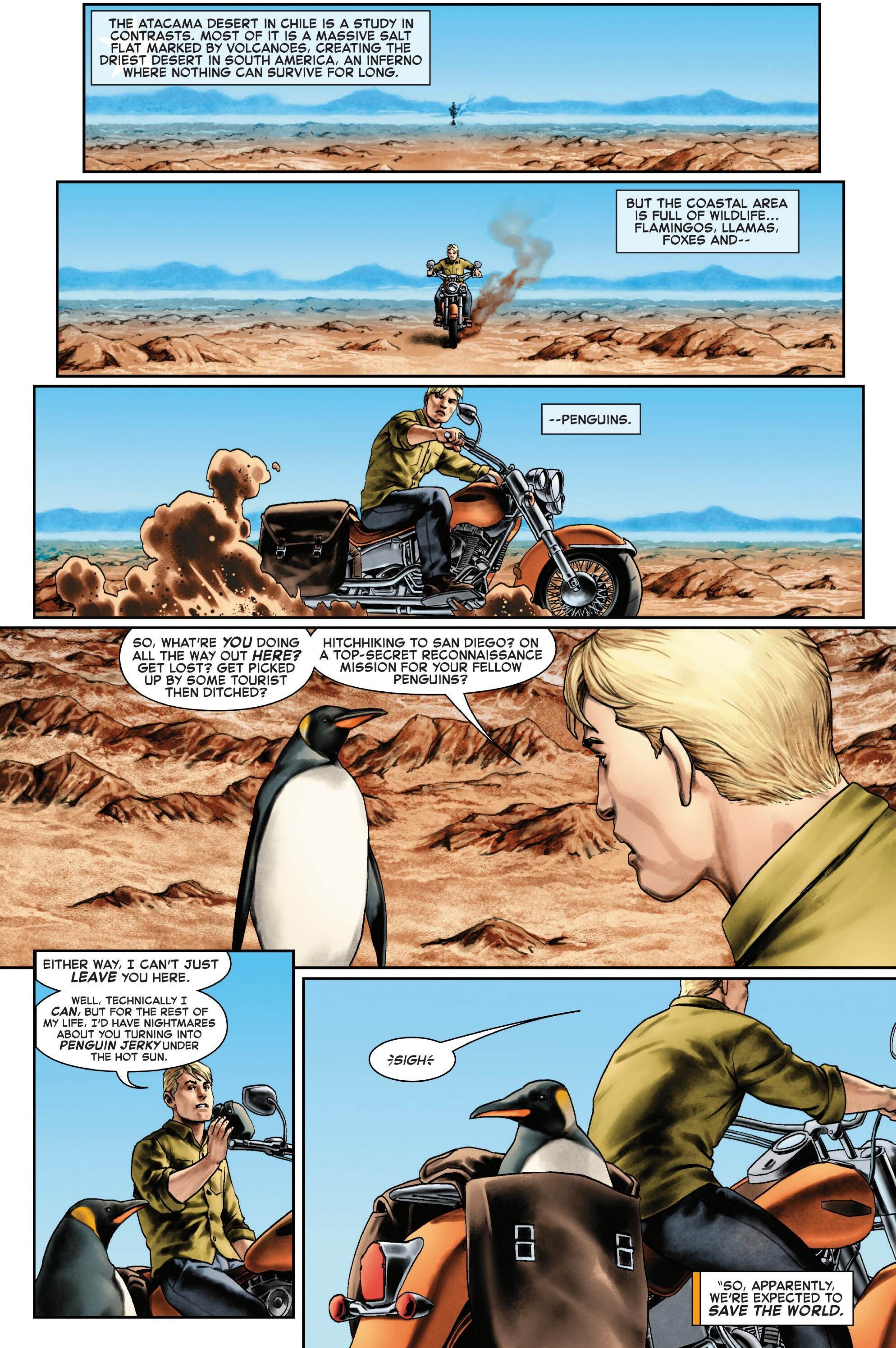

Love. Love fiercely and unwisely and without hesitation.
Love. While you still can.
"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN AND ALL STOPS IN BETWEEN...BEINGS AND NON-BEINGS...MUNDANES AND MUTANTS...THE LOST, THE HOPING-TO-BE-FOUND AND THE HOPING-TO-DISAPPEAR..."
TO ALL THE SOULS WHO ENTERED HERE TONIGHT SEEKING SHELTER FROM THE STORM... WELCOME TO THE FRONT DOOR!
"THERE IS NO PAIN HERE. NO STRUGGLE. NO VIOLENCE."
AND NO DEATH.
BECAUSE WE'RE UNDER PROTECTION, AREN'T WE?
YOU BET WE ARE.
"LET THERE BE LIGHT!"
orichel
SHEL

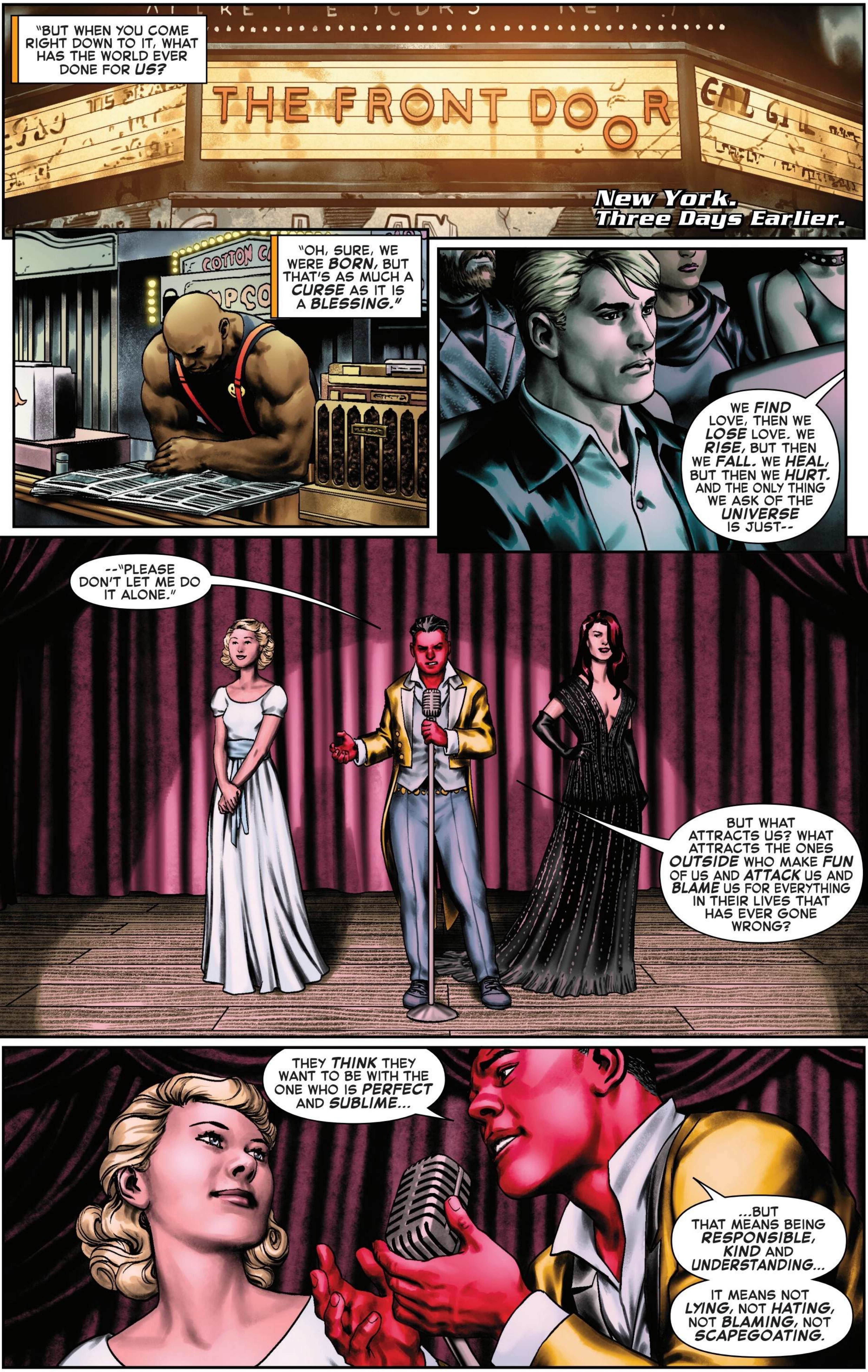


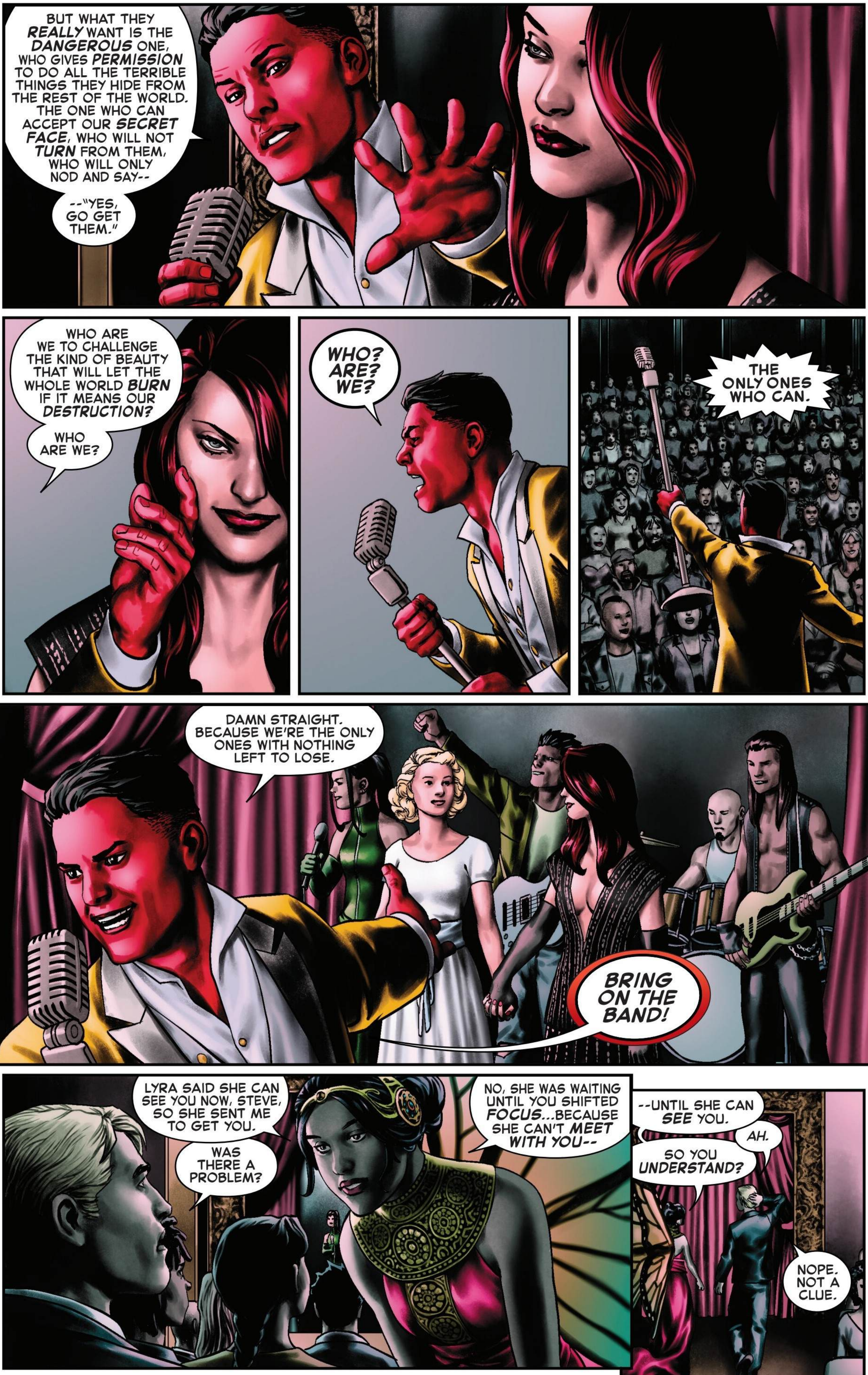
CAPTAIN AMERICA

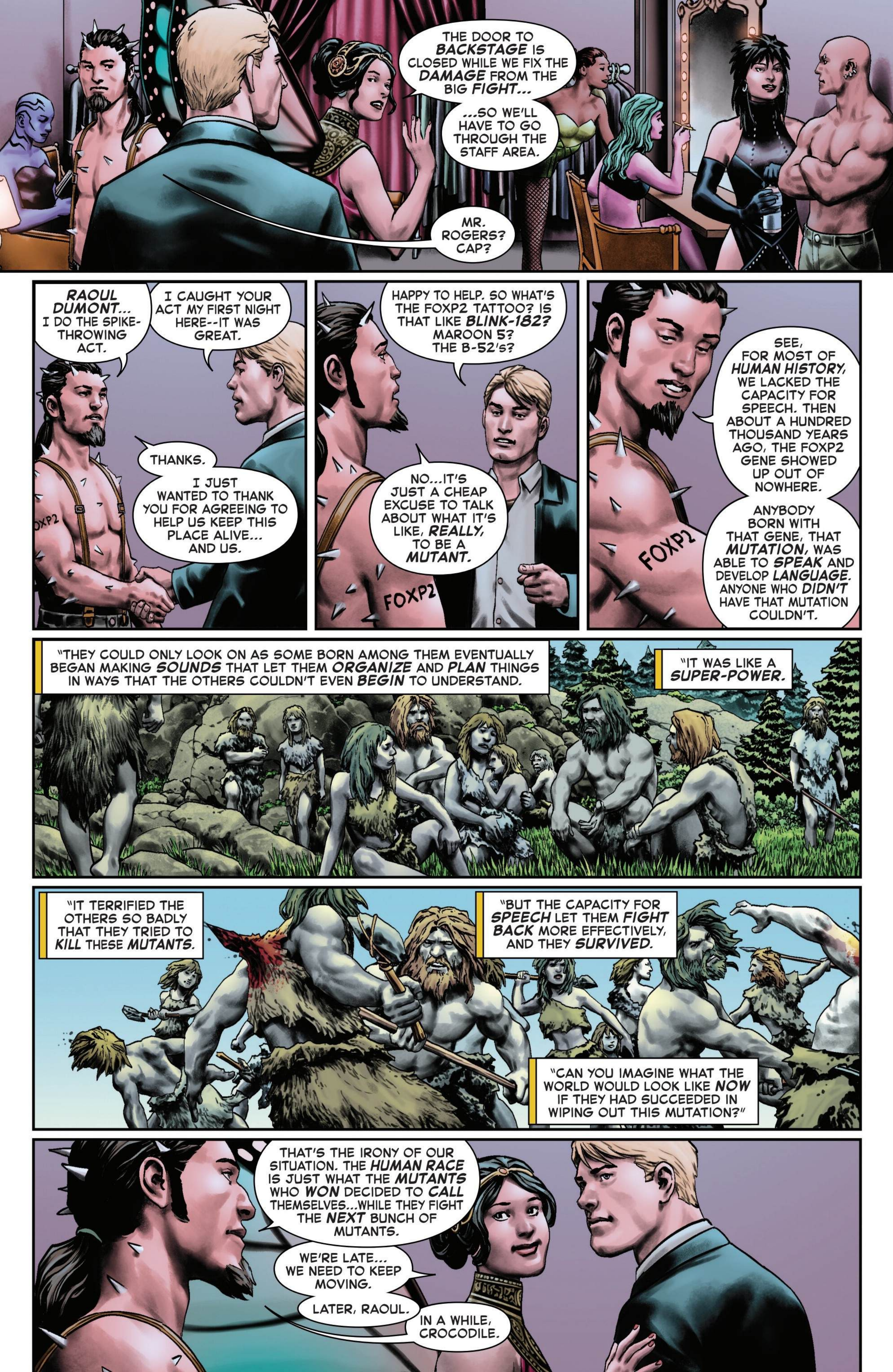
THE DESERT OF THE UNKNOWN

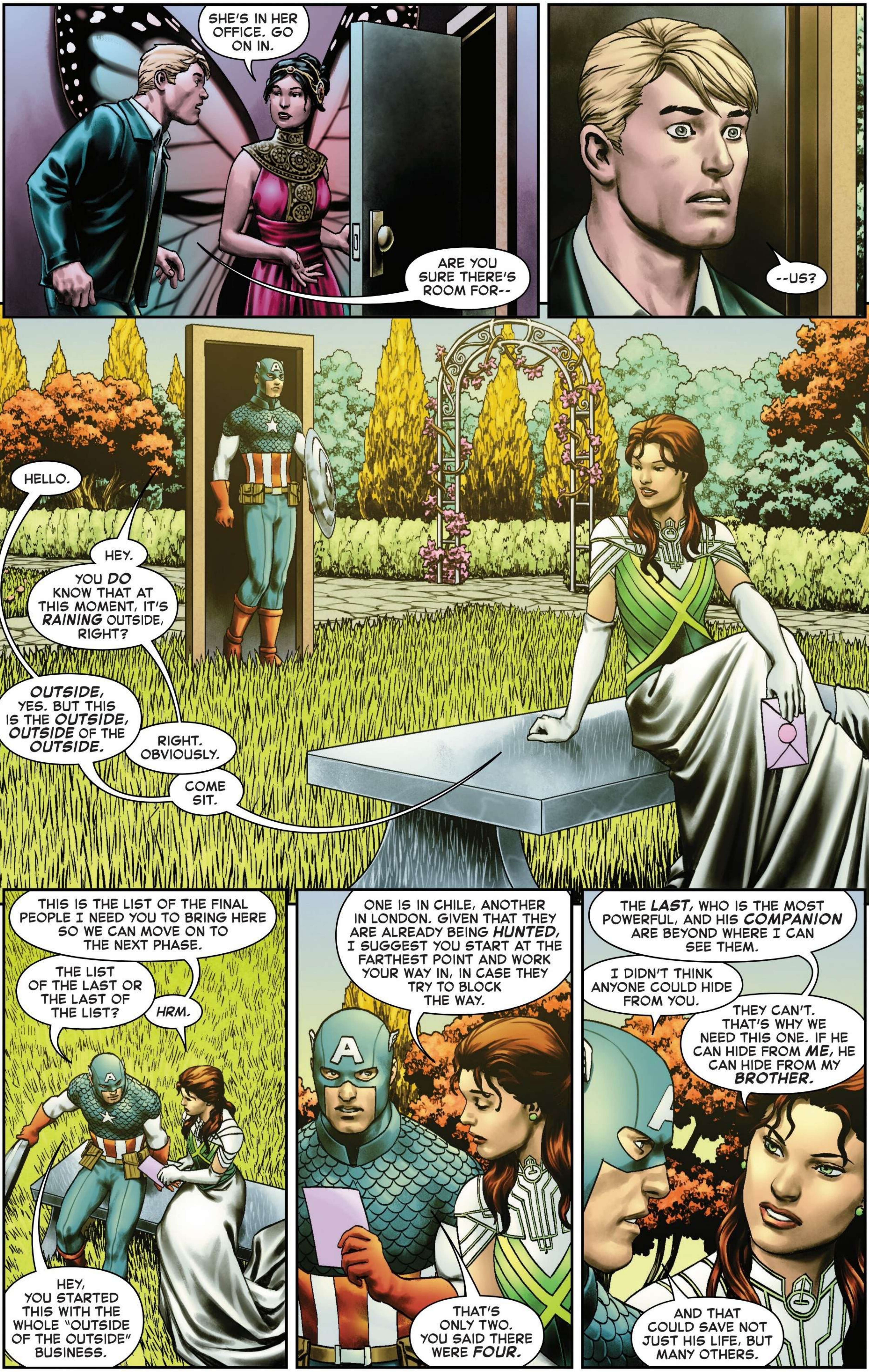
№9

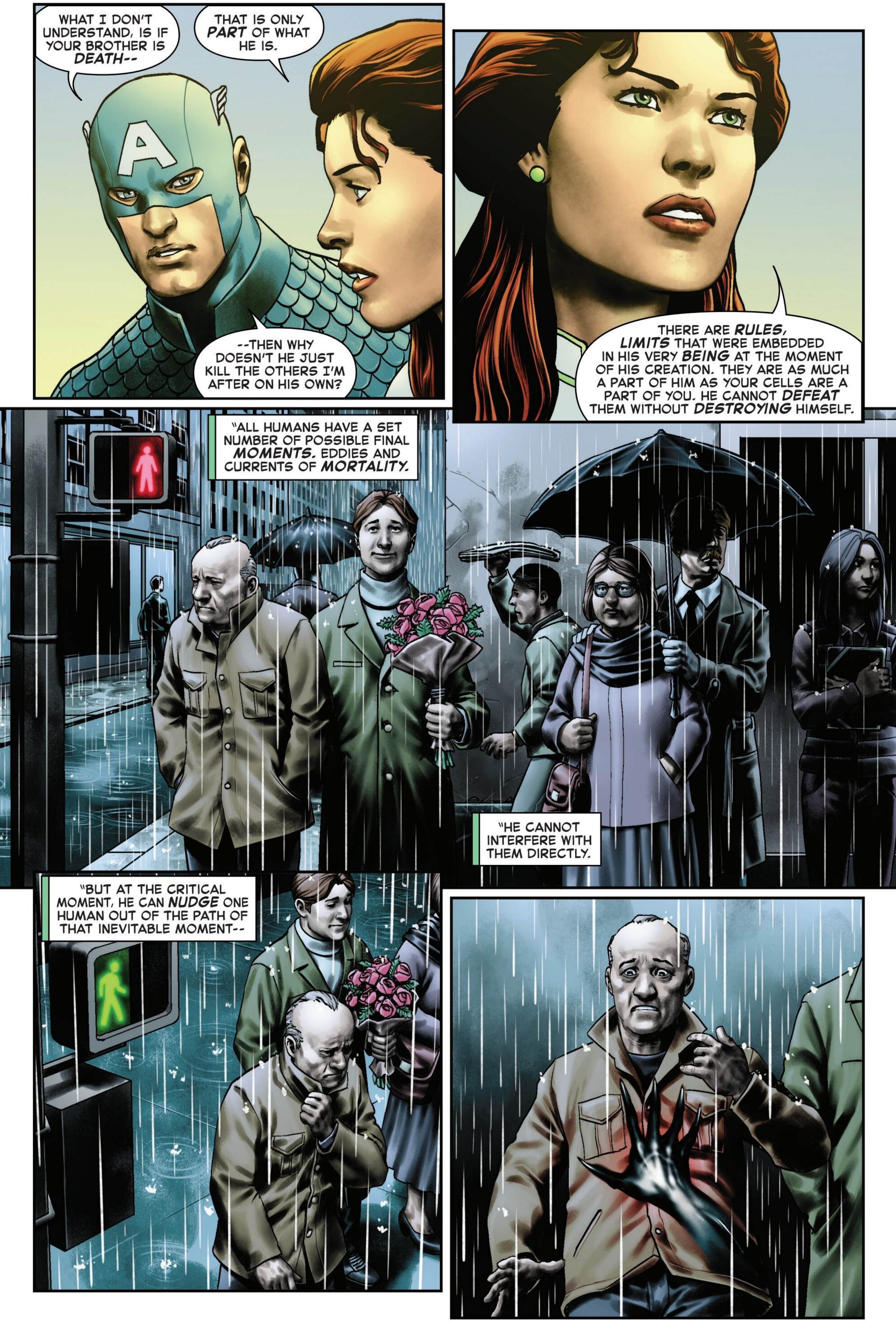

THE ATACAMA DESERT IN CHILE IS A STUDY IN CONTRASTS. MOST OF IT IS A MASSIVE SALT FLAT MARKED BY VOLCANOES, CREATING THE DRIEST DESERT IN SOUTH AMERICA, AN INFERNO WHERE NOTHING CAN SURVIVE FOR LONG.
BUT THE COASTAL AREA IS FULL OF WILDLIFE... FLAMINGOS, LLAMAS, FOXES AND--
--PENGUINS.
SO, WHAT'RE *YOU* DOING ALL THE WAY OUT *HERE?* GET LOST? GET PICKED UP BY SOME TOURIST THEN DITCHED?
HITCHHIKING TO SAN DIEGO? ON A TOP-SECRET RECONNAISSANCE MISSION FOR YOUR FELLOW PENGUINS?
EITHER WAY, I CAN'T JUST *LEAVE* YOU HERE.
WELL, TECHNICALLY I *CAN,* BUT FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE, I'D HAVE NIGHTMARES ABOUT YOU TURNING INTO *PENGUIN JERKY* UNDER THE HOT SUN.
SIGH
"SO, APPARENTLY, WE'RE EXPECTED TO *SAVE THE WORLD.*

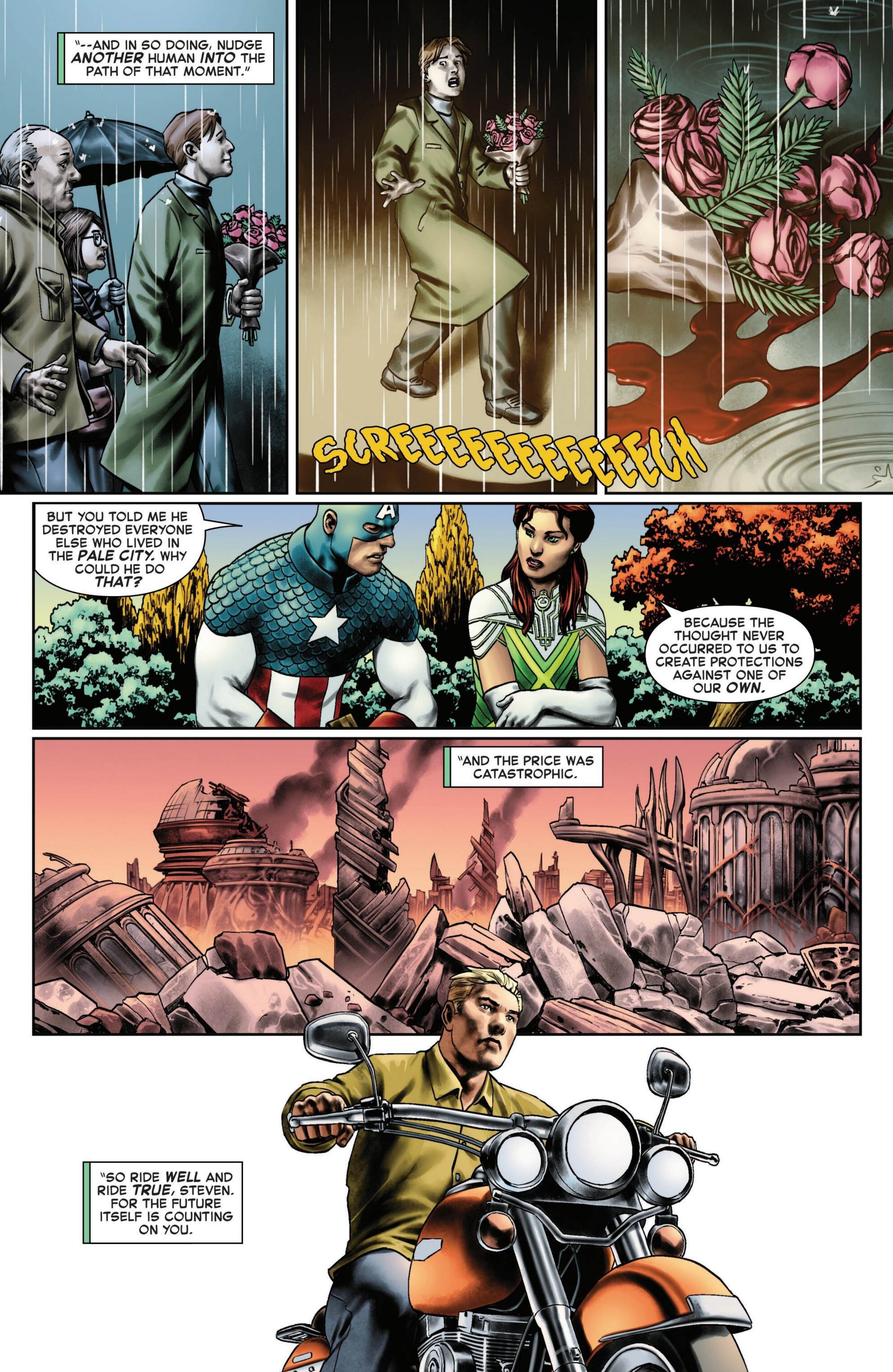

"BUT WHEN YOU COME RIGHT DOWN TO IT, WHAT HAS THE WORLD EVER DONE FOR *US?*
THE FRONT DOOR
New York. Three Days Earlier.
COTTON CA
PCO
"OH, SURE, WE WERE ***BORN,*** BUT THAT'S AS MUCH A ***CURSE*** AS IT IS A ***BLESSING."***
WE ***FIND*** LOVE, THEN WE ***LOSE*** LOVE. WE ***RISE,*** BUT THEN WE ***FALL.*** WE ***HEAL,*** BUT THEN WE ***HURT.*** AND THE ONLY THING WE ASK OF THE ***UNIVERSE*** IS JUST--
--"PLEASE DON'T LET ME DO IT ALONE."
BUT WHAT ATTRACTS US? WHAT ATTRACTS THE ONES ***OUTSIDE*** WHO MAKE ***FUN*** OF US AND ***ATTACK*** US AND ***BLAME*** US FOR EVERYTHING IN THEIR LIVES THAT HAS EVER GONE WRONG?
THEY ***THINK*** THEY WANT TO BE WITH THE ONE WHO IS ***PERFECT*** AND ***SUBLIME...***
...BUT THAT MEANS BEING ***RESPONSIBLE, KIND*** AND ***UNDERSTANDING...***
IT MEANS NOT ***LYING,*** NOT ***HATING,*** NOT ***BLAMING,*** NOT ***SCAPEGOATING.***

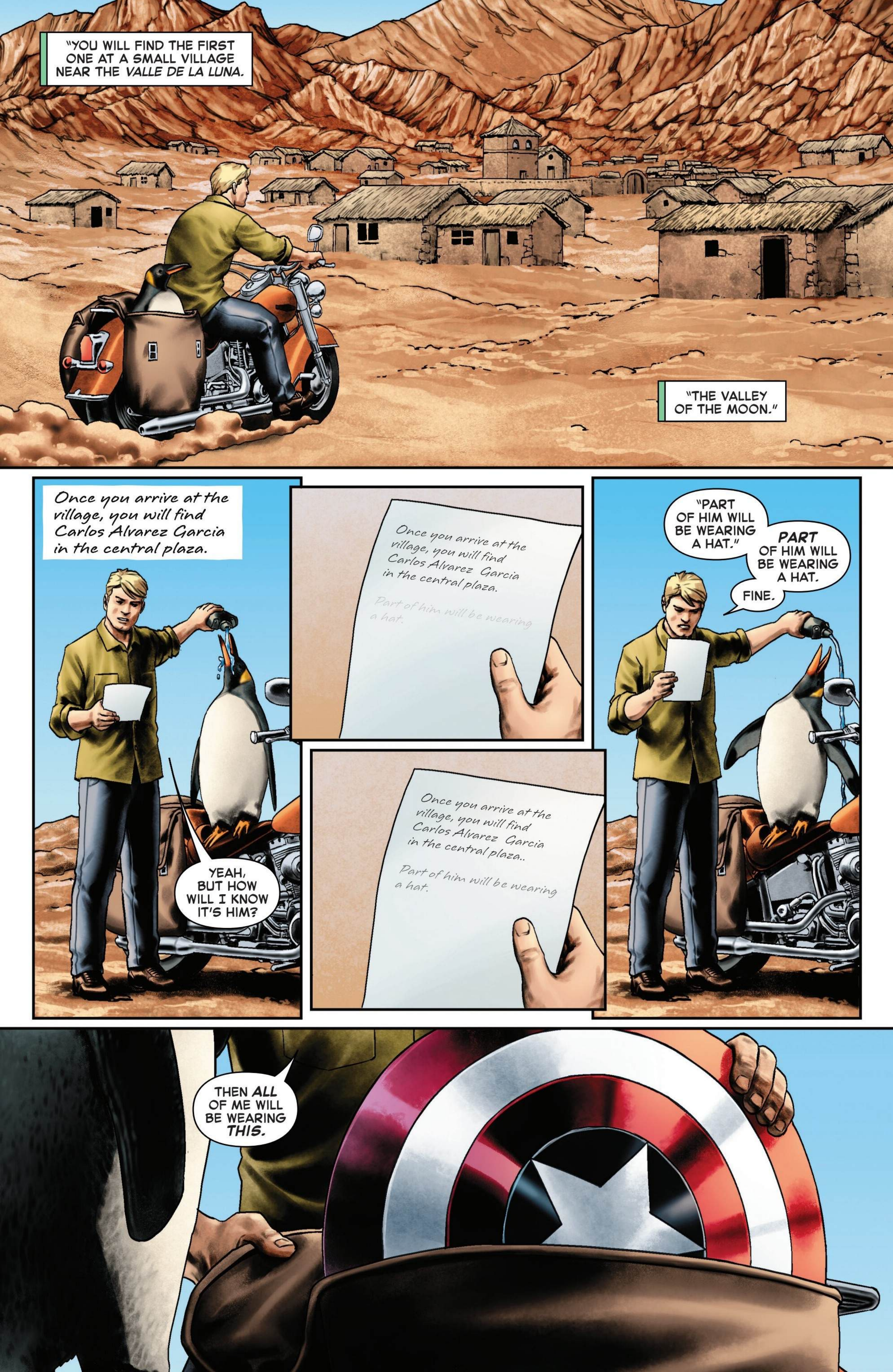

BUT WHAT THEY REALLY WANT IS THE DANGEROUS ONE, WHO GIVES PERMISSION TO DO ALL THE TERRIBLE THINGS THEY HIDE FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD. THE ONE WHO CAN ACCEPT OUR SECRET FACE, WHO WILL NOT TURN FROM THEM, WHO WILL ONLY NOD AND SAY--
--"YES, GO GET THEM."
WHO ARE WE TO CHALLENGE THE KIND OF BEAUTY THAT WILL LET THE WHOLE WORLD BURN IF IT MEANS OUR DESTRUCTION?
WHO ARE WE?
WHO? ARE? WE?
THE ONLY ONES WHO CAN.
DAMN STRAIGHT. BECAUSE WE'RE THE ONLY ONES WITH NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE.
BRING ON THE BAND!
LYRA SAID SHE CAN SEE YOU NOW, STEVE, SO SHE SENT ME TO GET YOU.
WAS THERE A PROBLEM?
NO, SHE WAS WAITING UNTIL YOU SHIFTED FOCUS...BECAUSE SHE CAN'T MEET WITH YOU--
--UNTIL SHE CAN SEE YOU.
AH.
SO YOU UNDERSTAND?
NOPE. NOT A CLUE.

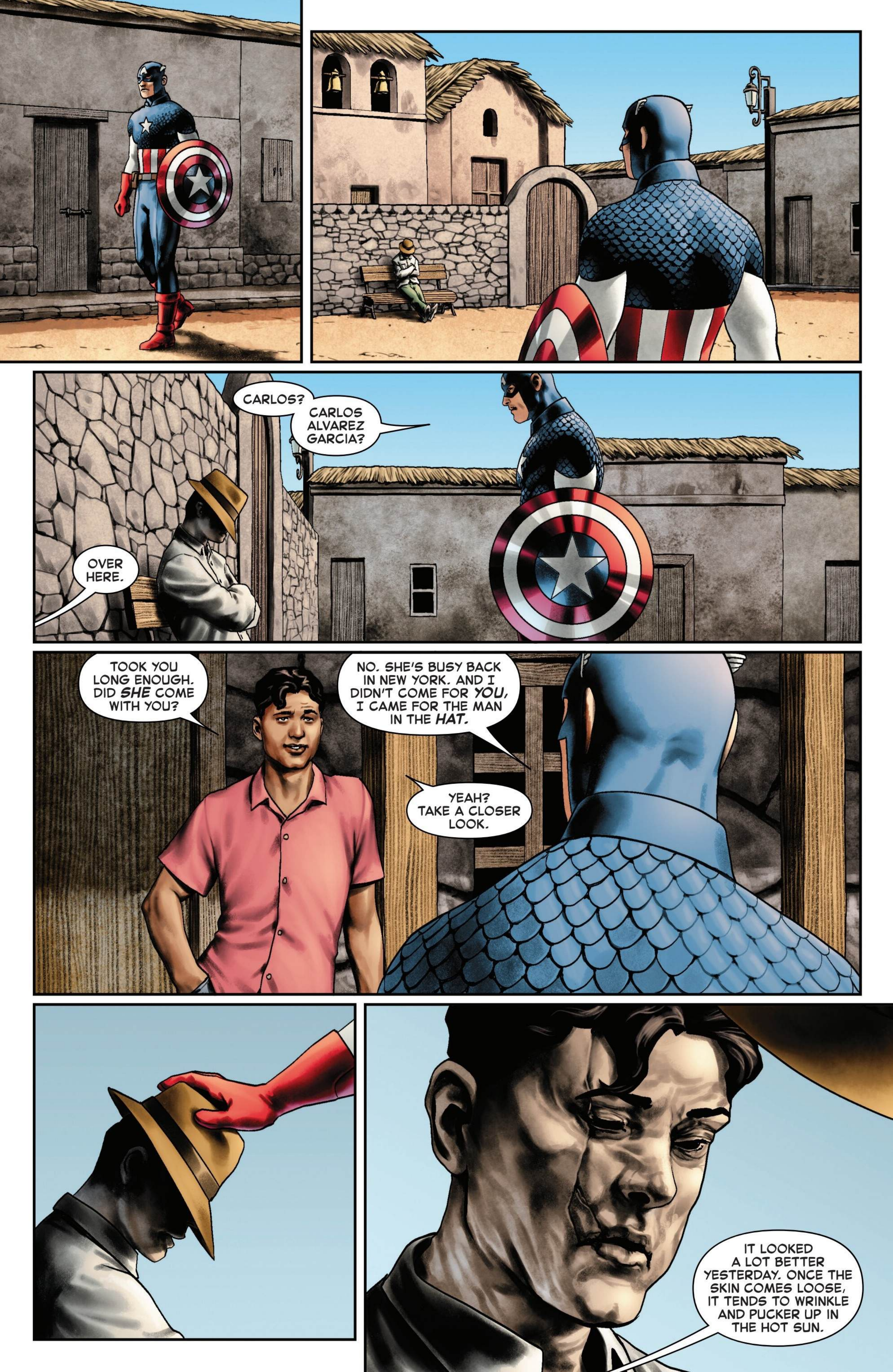

THE DOOR TO *BACKSTAGE* IS CLOSED WHILE WE FIX THE *DAMAGE* FROM THE BIG *FIGHT*...
...SO WE'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE STAFF AREA.
MR. ROGERS? CAP?
RAOUL DUMONT... I DO THE SPIKE-THROWING ACT.
I CAUGHT YOUR ACT MY FIRST NIGHT HERE--IT WAS GREAT.
THANKS.
I JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO HELP US KEEP THIS PLACE ALIVE... AND US.
FOXP2
HAPPY TO HELP. SO WHAT'S THE FOXP2 TATTOO? IS THAT LIKE *BLINK-182?* MAROON 5? THE B-52'S?
NO...IT'S JUST A CHEAP EXCUSE TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IT'S LIKE, *REALLY,* TO BE A *MUTANT.*
FOXP2
SEE, FOR MOST OF *HUMAN HISTORY,* WE LACKED THE CAPACITY FOR SPEECH. THEN ABOUT A HUNDRED THOUSAND YEARS AGO, THE FOXP2 GENE SHOWED UP OUT OF NOWHERE.
ANYBODY BORN WITH THAT GENE, THAT *MUTATION,* WAS ABLE TO *SPEAK* AND DEVELOP *LANGUAGE.* ANYONE WHO *DIDN'T* HAVE THAT MUTATION COULDN'T.
FOXP2
"THEY COULD ONLY LOOK ON AS SOME BORN AMONG THEM EVENTUALLY BEGAN MAKING *SOUNDS* THAT LET THEM *ORGANIZE* AND *PLAN* THINGS IN WAYS THAT THE OTHERS COULDN'T EVEN *BEGIN* TO UNDERSTAND.
"IT WAS LIKE A *SUPER-POWER.*
"IT TERRIFIED THE OTHERS SO BADLY THAT THEY TRIED TO *KILL* THESE *MUTANTS.*
"BUT THE CAPACITY FOR *SPEECH* LET THEM *FIGHT BACK* MORE EFFECTIVELY, AND THEY *SURVIVED.*
"CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT THE WORLD WOULD LOOK LIKE *NOW* IF THEY HAD SUCCEEDED IN WIPING OUT THIS MUTATION?"
THAT'S THE IRONY OF OUR SITUATION. THE *HUMAN RACE* IS JUST WHAT THE *MUTANTS* WHO *WON* DECIDED TO *CALL* THEMSELVES...WHILE THEY FIGHT THE *NEXT* BUNCH OF MUTANTS.
WE'RE LATE... WE NEED TO KEEP MOVING.
LATER, RAOUL.
IN A WHILE, CROCODILE.

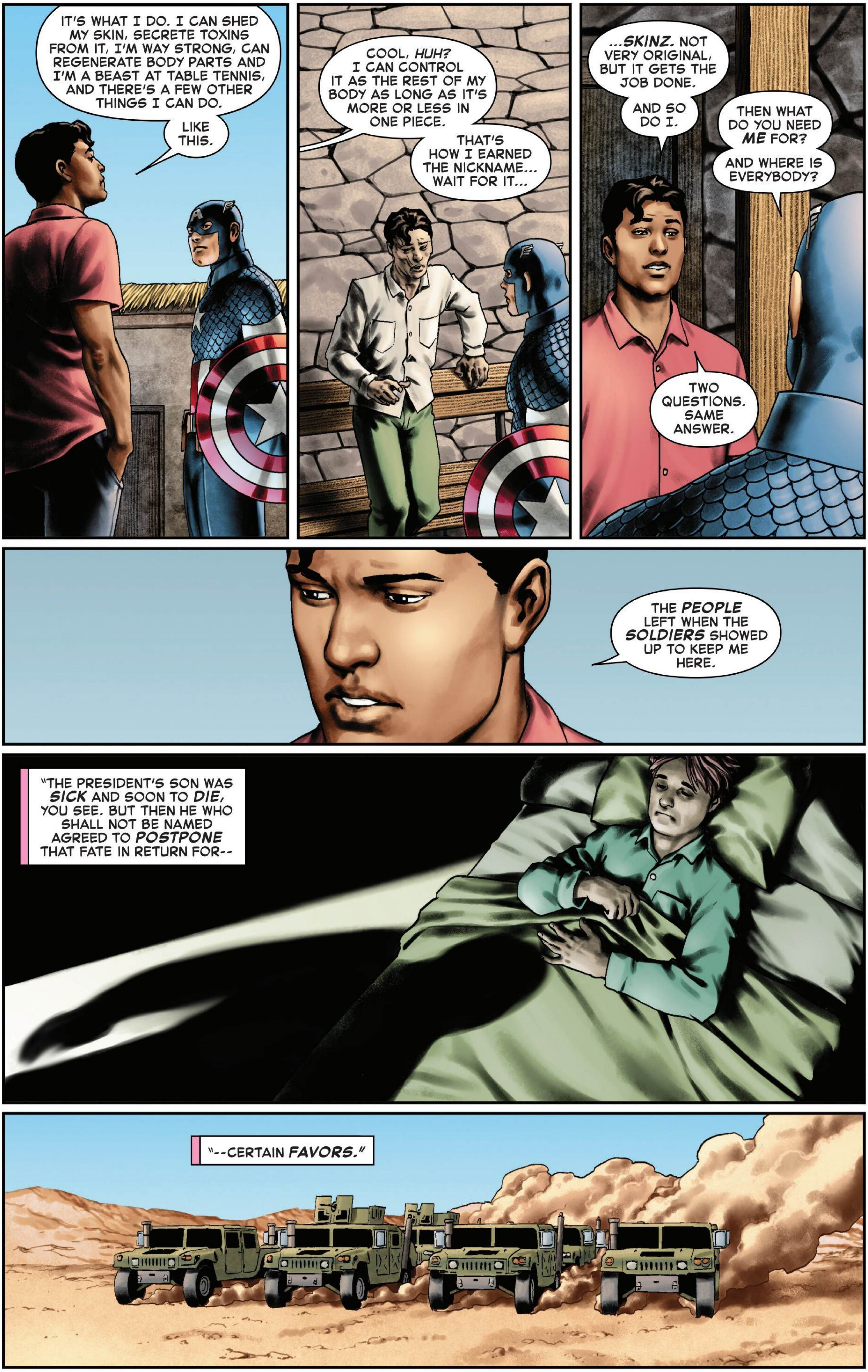

SHE'S IN HER OFFICE. GO ON IN.
ARE YOU SURE THERE'S ROOM FOR--
--US?
HELLO.
HEY.
YOU *DO* KNOW THAT AT THIS MOMENT, IT'S *RAINING* OUTSIDE, RIGHT?
OUTSIDE, YES. BUT THIS IS THE *OUTSIDE, OUTSIDE* OF THE *OUTSIDE.*
RIGHT. OBVIOUSLY.
COME SIT.
THIS IS THE LIST OF THE FINAL PEOPLE I NEED YOU TO BRING HERE SO WE CAN MOVE ON TO THE NEXT PHASE.
THE LIST OF THE LAST OR THE LAST OF THE LIST?
HRM.
HEY, YOU STARTED THIS WITH THE WHOLE "OUTSIDE OF THE OUTSIDE" BUSINESS.
ONE IS IN CHILE, ANOTHER IN LONDON. GIVEN THAT THEY ARE ALREADY BEING *HUNTED,* I SUGGEST YOU START AT THE FARTHEST POINT AND WORK YOUR WAY IN, IN CASE THEY TRY TO BLOCK THE WAY.
THAT'S ONLY TWO. YOU SAID THERE WERE *FOUR.*
THE *LAST,* WHO IS THE MOST POWERFUL, AND HIS *COMPANION* ARE BEYOND WHERE I CAN SEE THEM.
I DIDN'T THINK ANYONE COULD HIDE FROM YOU.
THEY CAN'T. THAT'S WHY WE NEED THIS ONE. IF HE CAN HIDE FROM *ME,* HE CAN HIDE FROM MY *BROTHER.*
AND THAT COULD SAVE NOT JUST HIS LIFE, BUT MANY OTHERS.

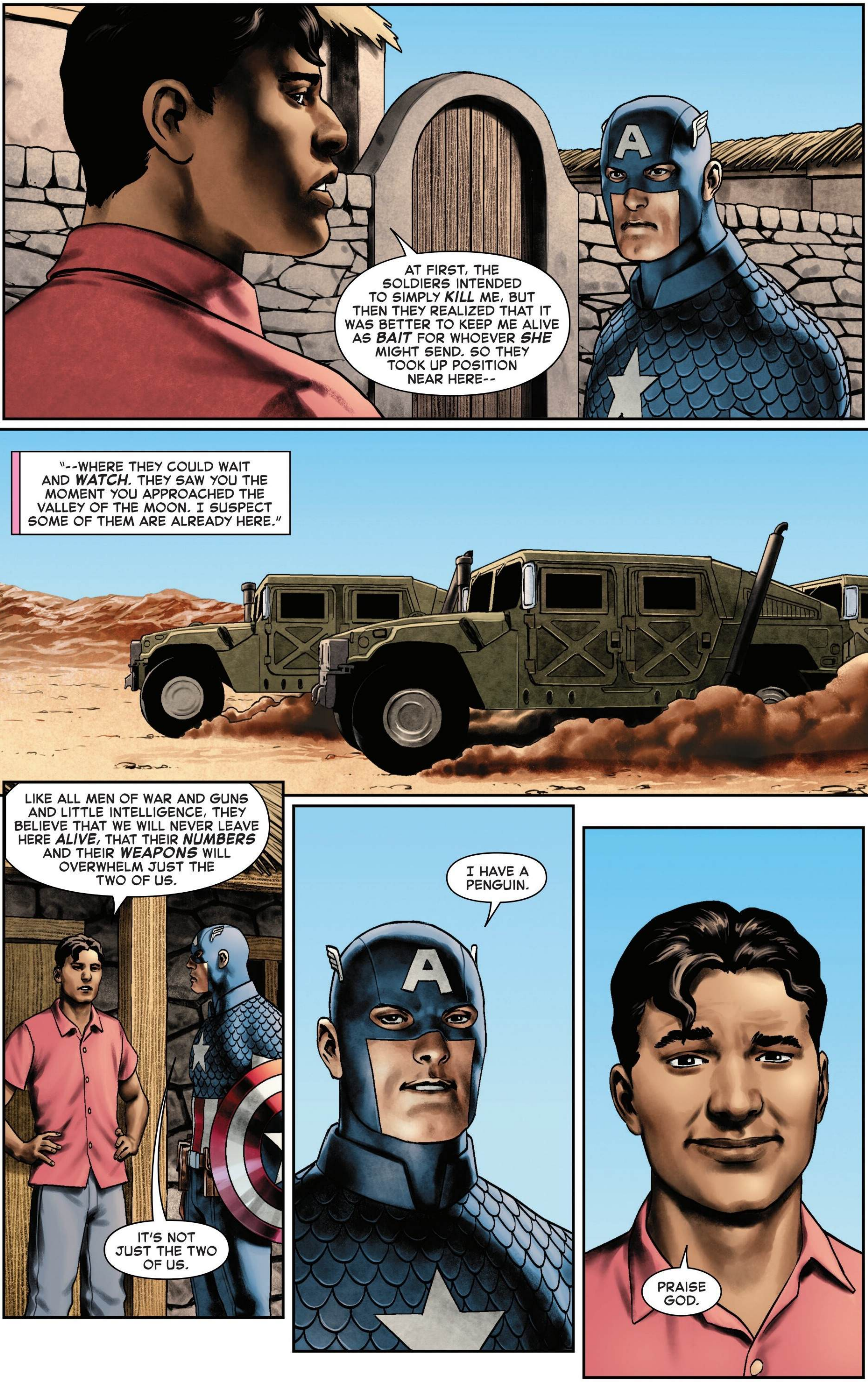

WHAT I DON'T UNDERSTAND, IS IF YOUR BROTHER IS *DEATH*--
THAT IS ONLY *PART* OF WHAT HE IS.
--THEN WHY DOESN'T HE JUST KILL THE OTHERS I'M AFTER ON HIS OWN?
THERE ARE *RULES*, *LIMITS* THAT WERE EMBEDDED IN HIS VERY *BEING* AT THE MOMENT OF HIS CREATION. THEY ARE AS MUCH A PART OF HIM AS YOUR CELLS ARE A PART OF YOU. HE CANNOT *DEFEAT* THEM WITHOUT *DESTROYING* HIMSELF.
"ALL HUMANS HAVE A SET NUMBER OF POSSIBLE FINAL *MOMENTS.* EDDIES AND CURRENTS OF *MORTALITY.*
"HE CANNOT INTERFERE WITH THEM DIRECTLY.
"BUT AT THE CRITICAL MOMENT, HE CAN *NUDGE* ONE HUMAN OUT OF THE PATH OF THAT INEVITABLE MOMENT--

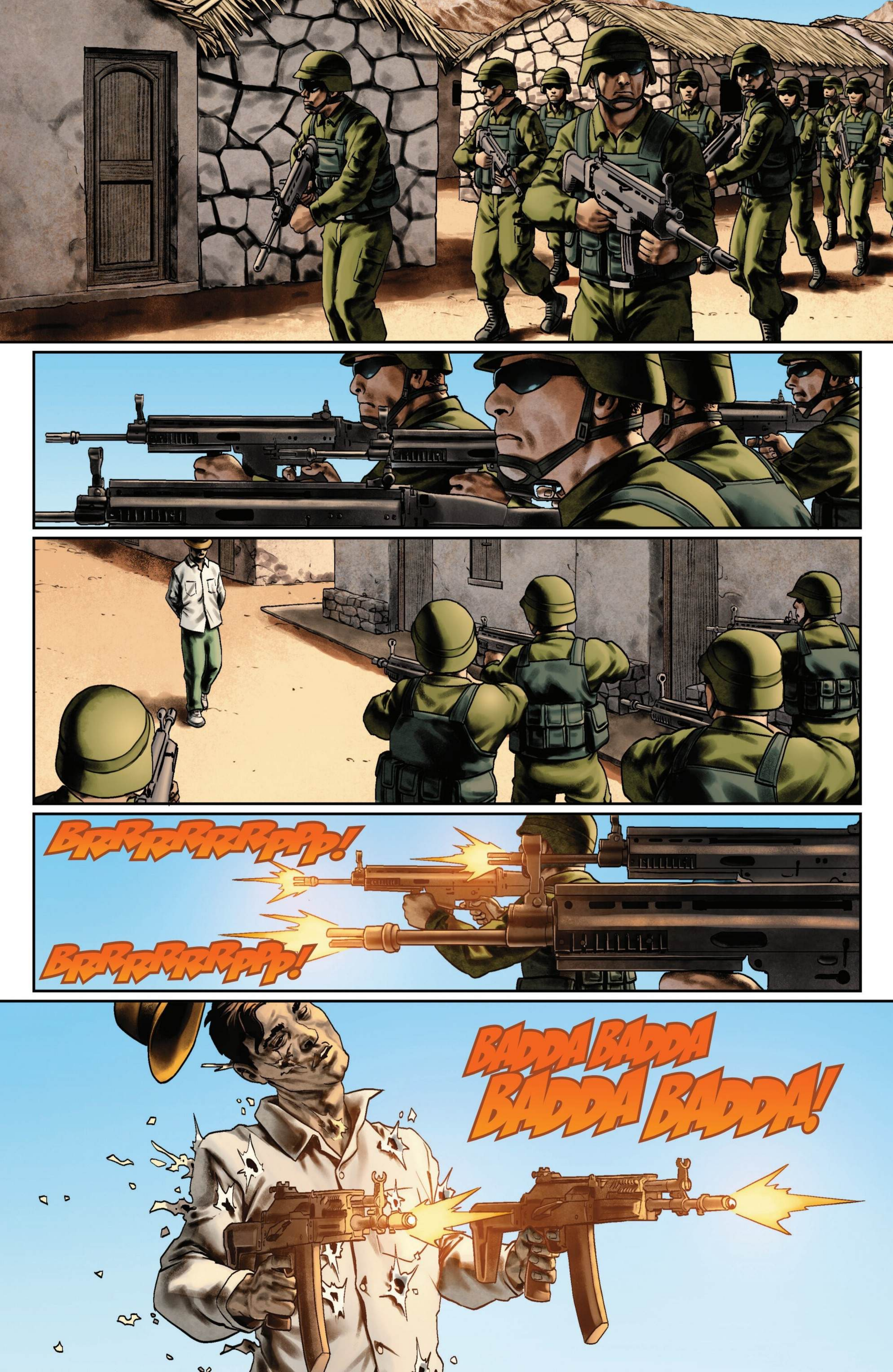

"--AND IN SO DOING, NUDGE ANOTHER HUMAN INTO THE PATH OF THAT MOMENT."
SCREEEEEEEEEEEEECH
BUT YOU TOLD ME HE DESTROYED EVERYONE ELSE WHO LIVED IN THE PALE CITY. WHY COULD HE DO THAT?
BECAUSE THE THOUGHT NEVER OCCURRED TO US TO CREATE PROTECTIONS AGAINST ONE OF OUR OWN.
"AND THE PRICE WAS CATASTROPHIC.
"SO RIDE WELL AND RIDE TRUE, STEVEN. FOR THE FUTURE ITSELF IS COUNTING ON YOU.

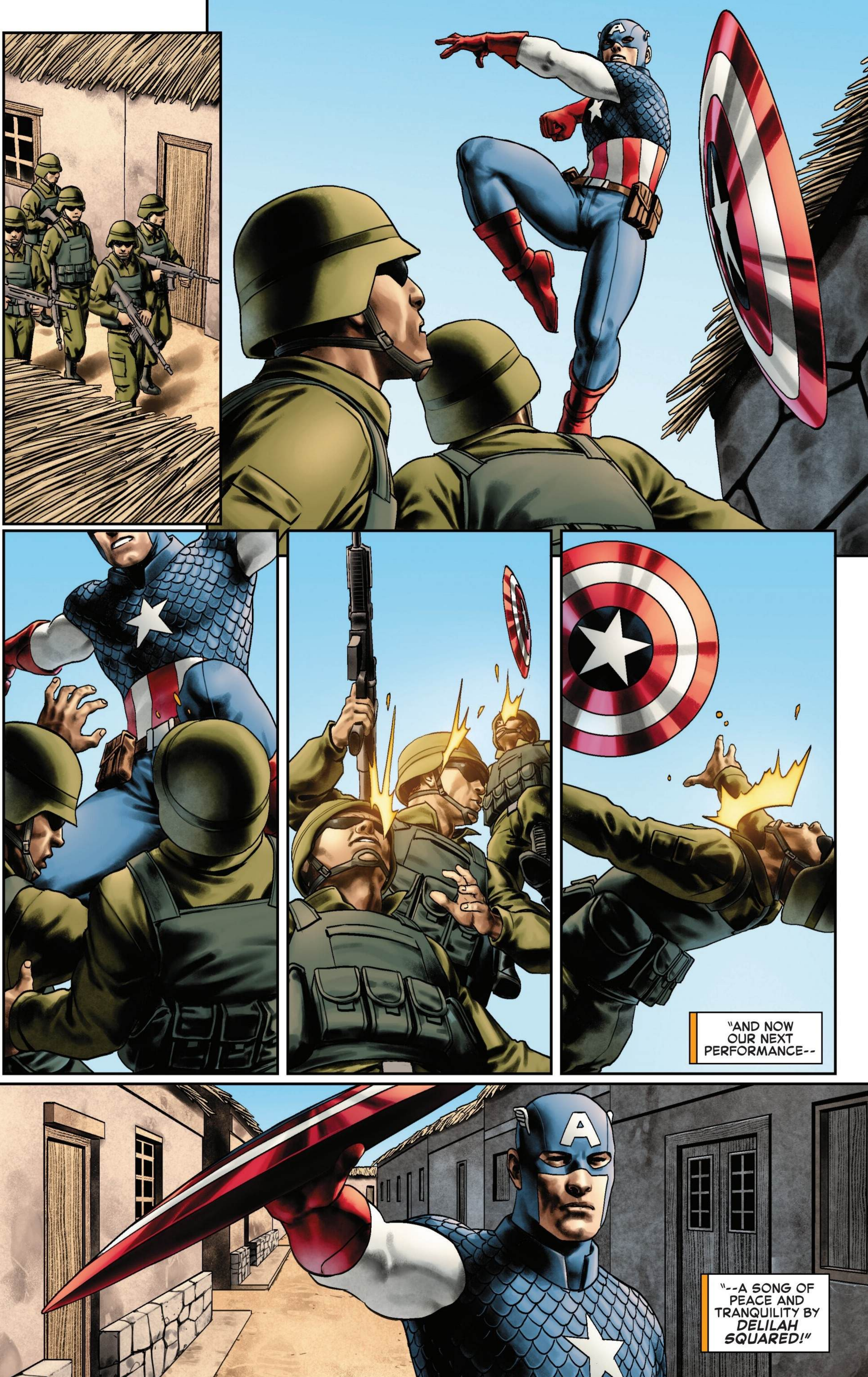

"YOU WILL FIND THE FIRST ONE AT A SMALL VILLAGE NEAR THE *VALLE DE LA LUNA.*
"THE VALLEY OF THE MOON."
Once you arrive at the village, you will find Carlos Alvarez Garcia in the central plaza.
YEAH, BUT HOW WILL I KNOW IT'S HIM?
Once you arrive at the village, you will find Carlos Alvarez Garcia in the central plaza.
Part of him will be wearing a hat.
Once you arrive at the village, you will find Carlos Alvarez Garcia in the central plaza..
Part of him will be wearing a hat.
"PART OF HIM WILL BE WEARING A HAT."
PART OF HIM WILL BE WEARING A HAT.
FINE.
THEN ***ALL*** OF ME WILL BE WEARING ***THIS.***

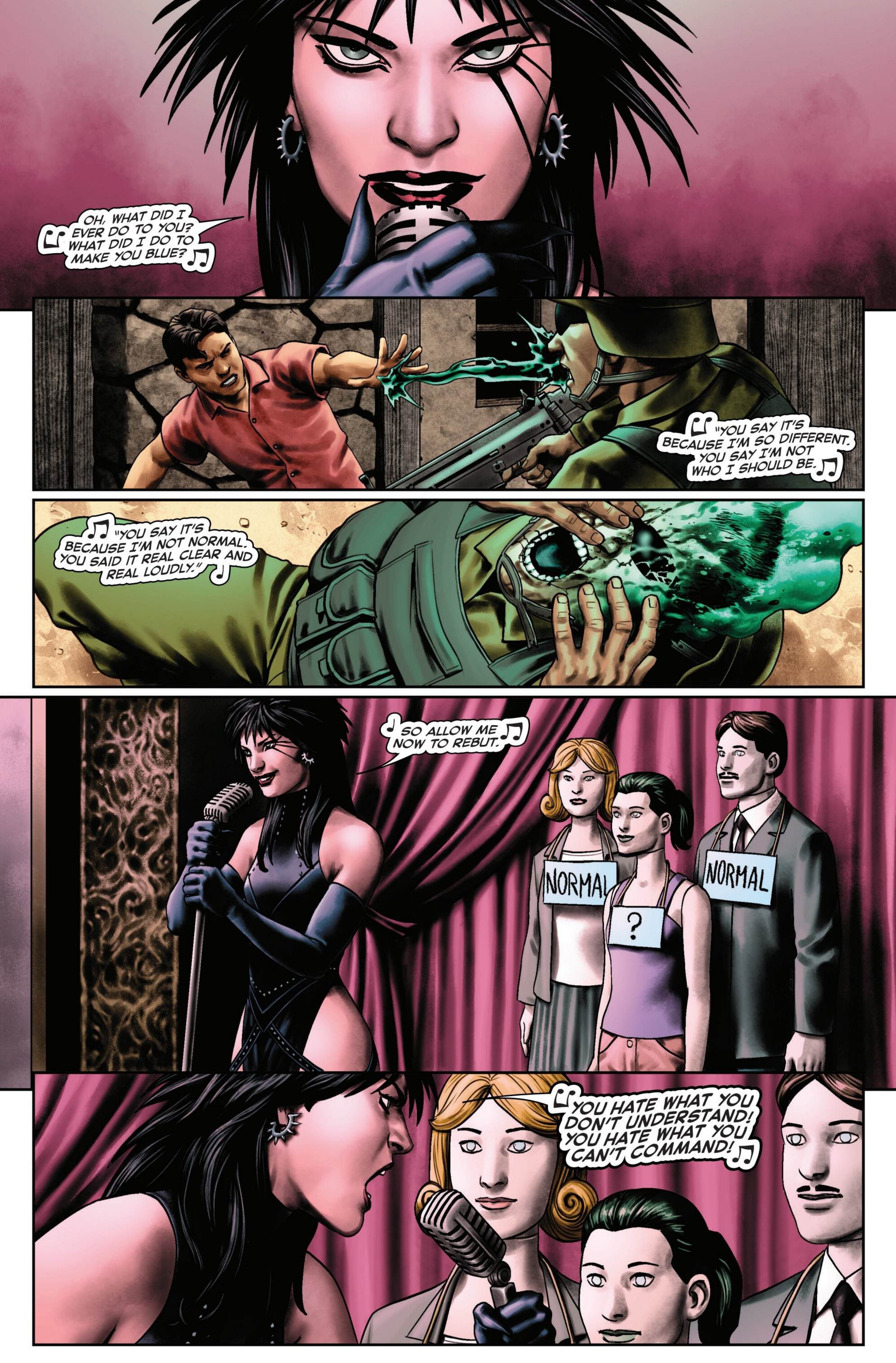

CARLOS? CARLOS ALVAREZ GARCIA?
OVER HERE.
TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH. DID *SHE* COME WITH YOU?
NO. SHE'S BUSY BACK IN NEW YORK. AND I DIDN'T COME FOR *YOU*, I CAME FOR THE MAN IN THE *HAT.*
YEAH? TAKE A CLOSER LOOK.
IT LOOKED A LOT BETTER YESTERDAY. ONCE THE SKIN COMES LOOSE, IT TENDS TO WRINKLE AND PUCKER UP IN THE HOT SUN.

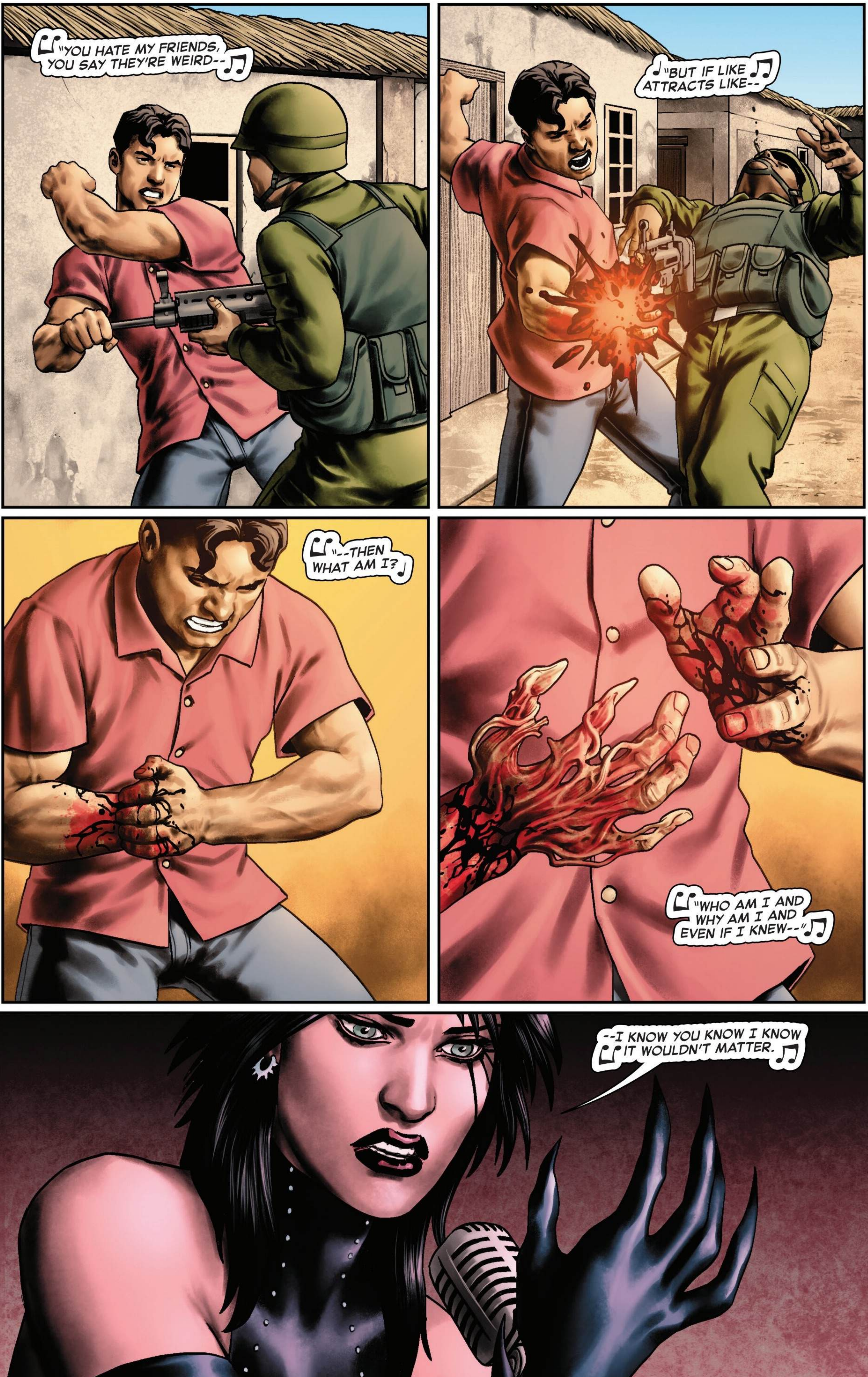

IT'S WHAT I DO. I CAN SHED MY SKIN, SECRETE TOXINS FROM IT, I'M WAY STRONG, CAN REGENERATE BODY PARTS AND I'M A BEAST AT TABLE TENNIS, AND THERE'S A FEW OTHER THINGS I CAN DO.
LIKE THIS.
COOL, *HUH?* I CAN CONTROL IT AS THE REST OF MY BODY AS LONG AS IT'S MORE OR LESS IN ONE PIECE.
THAT'S HOW I EARNED THE NICKNAME... WAIT FOR IT...
...*SKINZ.* NOT VERY ORIGINAL, BUT IT GETS THE JOB DONE.
AND SO DO I.
THEN WHAT DO YOU NEED *ME* FOR?
AND WHERE IS EVERYBODY?
TWO QUESTIONS. SAME ANSWER.
THE *PEOPLE* LEFT WHEN THE *SOLDIERS* SHOWED UP TO KEEP ME HERE.
"THE PRESIDENT'S SON WAS *SICK* AND SOON TO *DIE*, YOU SEE. BUT THEN HE WHO SHALL NOT BE NAMED AGREED TO *POSTPONE* THAT FATE IN RETURN FOR--
"--CERTAIN *FAVORS.*"

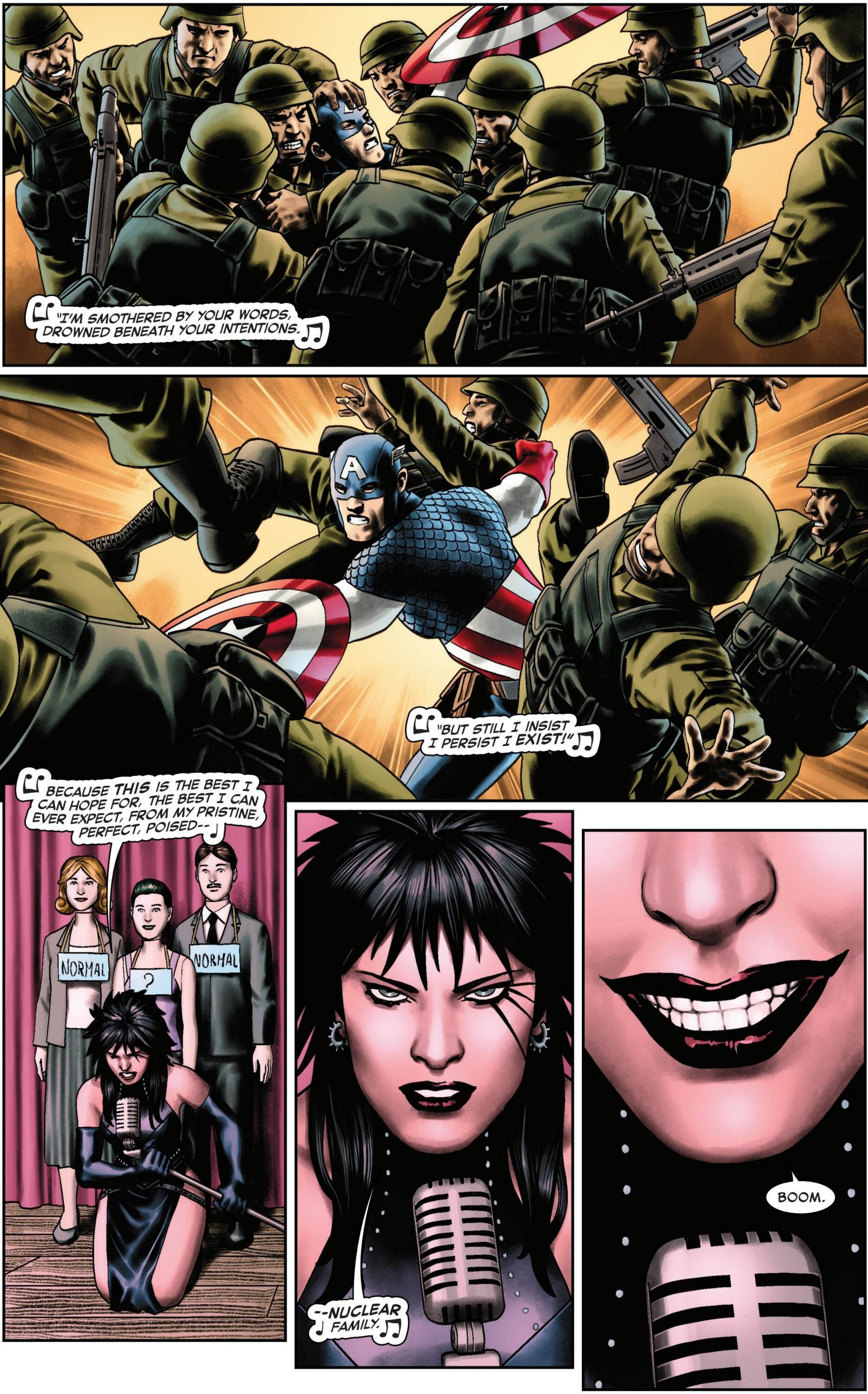

AT FIRST, THE SOLDIERS INTENDED TO SIMPLY *KILL* ME, BUT THEN THEY REALIZED THAT IT WAS BETTER TO KEEP ME ALIVE AS *BAIT* FOR WHOEVER *SHE* MIGHT SEND. SO THEY TOOK UP POSITION NEAR HERE--
"--WHERE THEY COULD WAIT AND *WATCH.* THEY SAW YOU THE MOMENT YOU APPROACHED THE VALLEY OF THE MOON. I SUSPECT SOME OF THEM ARE ALREADY HERE."
LIKE ALL MEN OF WAR AND GUNS AND LITTLE INTELLIGENCE, THEY BELIEVE THAT WE WILL NEVER LEAVE HERE *ALIVE,* THAT THEIR *NUMBERS* AND THEIR *WEAPONS* WILL OVERWHELM JUST THE TWO OF US.
IT'S NOT JUST THE TWO OF US.
I HAVE A PENGUIN.
PRAISE GOD.

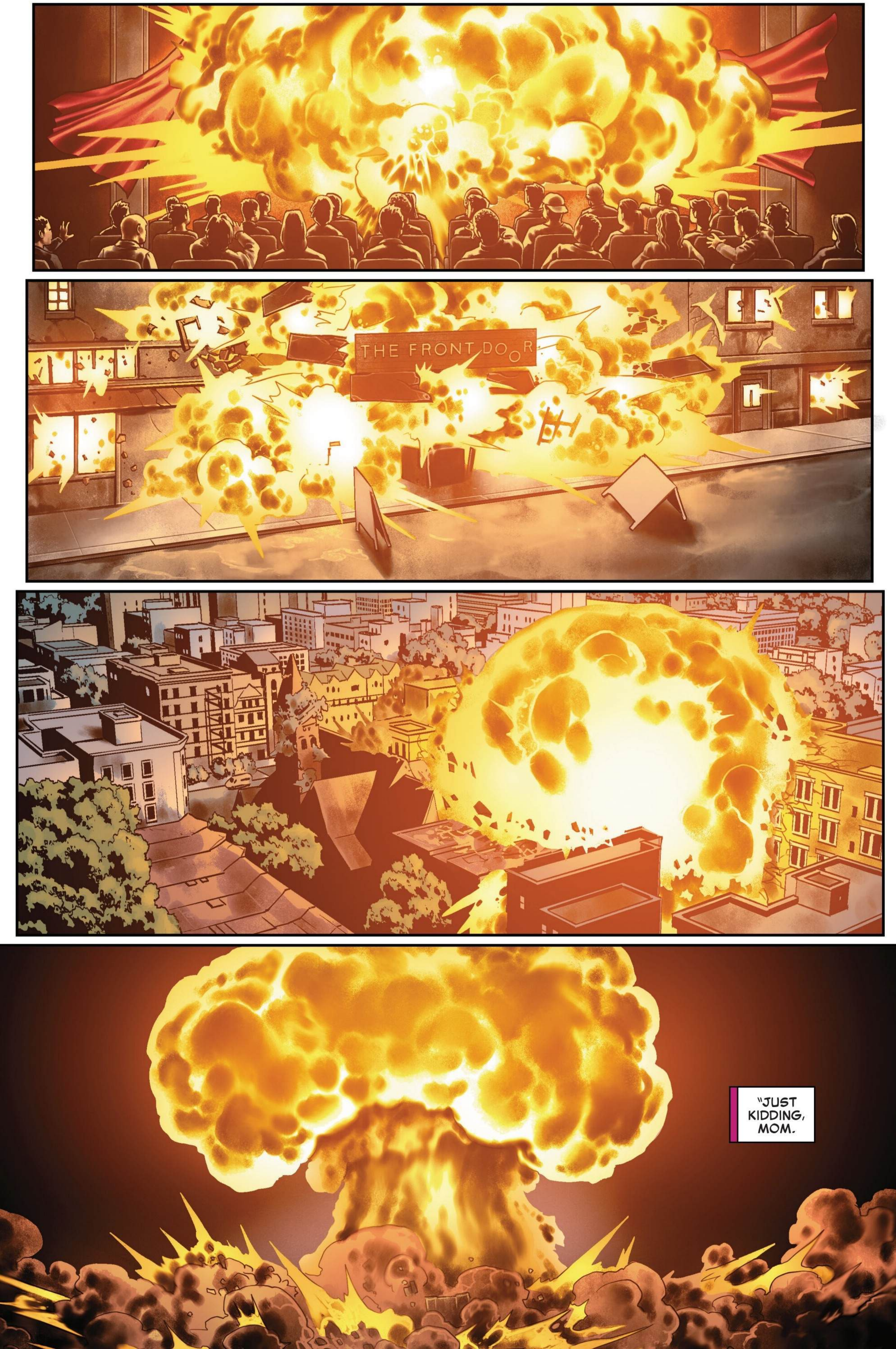

BRRRRRRPPP!
BRRRRRRPPP!
BADDA BADDA
BADDA BADDA!

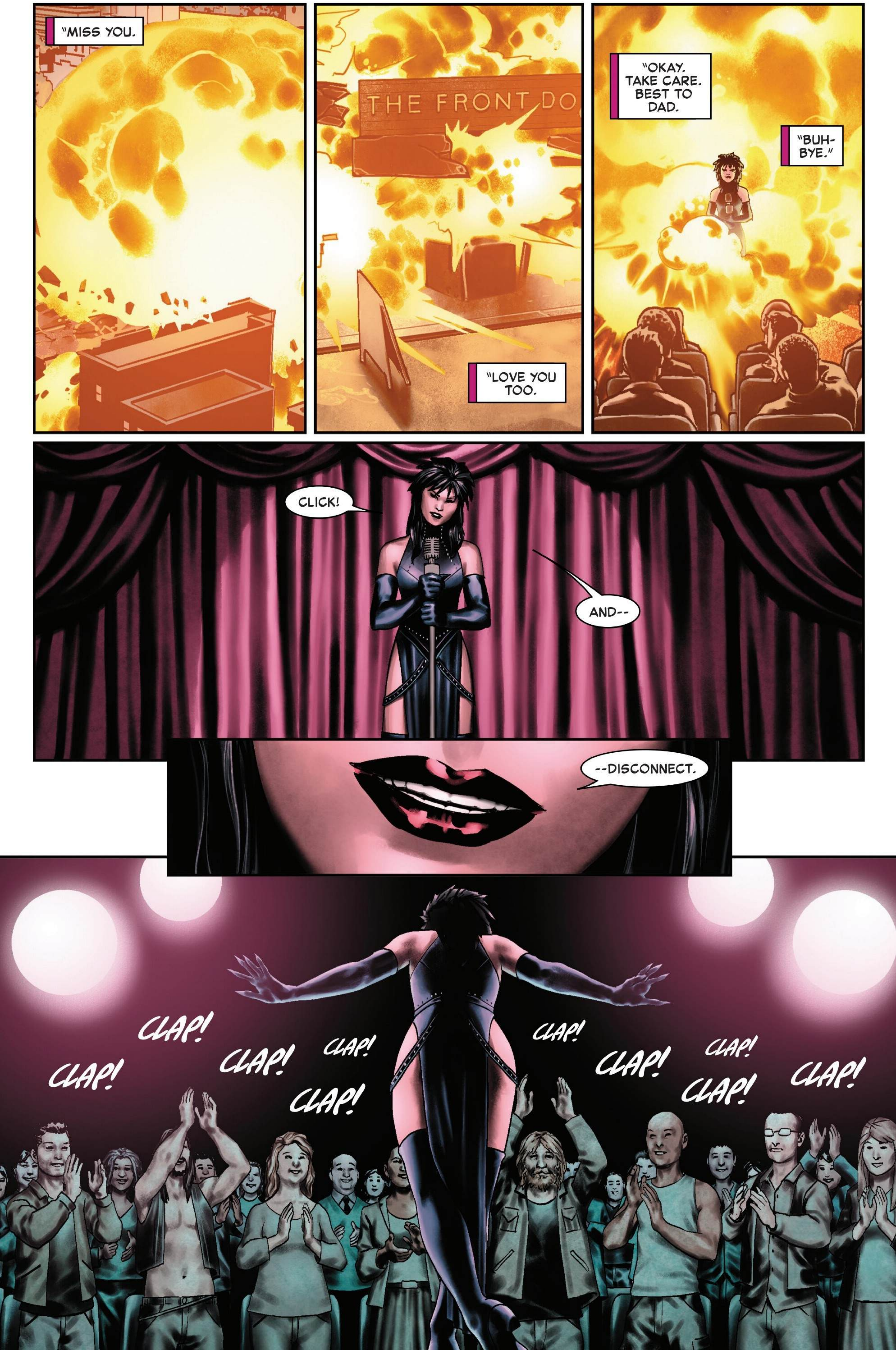

"AND NOW OUR NEXT PERFORMANCE--
"--A SONG OF PEACE AND TRANQUILITY BY *DELILAH SQUARED!*"

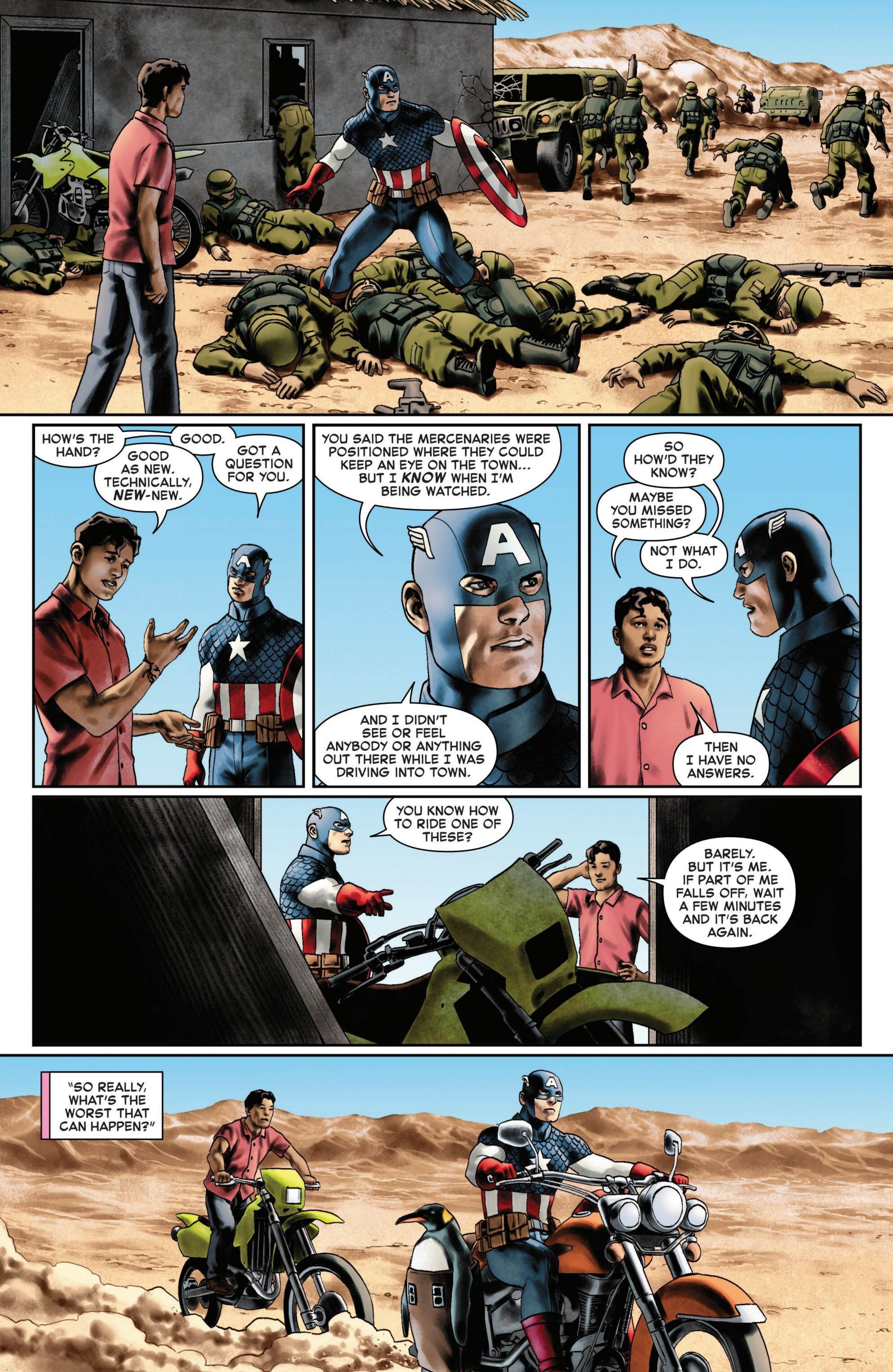

♫ OH, WHAT DID I EVER DO TO YOU? WHAT DID I DO TO MAKE YOU BLUE? ♫
♫ "YOU SAY IT'S BECAUSE I'M SO DIFFERENT. YOU SAY I'M NOT WHO I SHOULD BE. ♫
♫ "YOU SAY IT'S BECAUSE I'M NOT NORMAL. YOU SAID IT REAL CLEAR AND REAL LOUDLY." ♫
♩ SO ALLOW ME NOW TO REBUT. ♫
NORMAL
?
NORMAL
♫ YOU HATE WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! YOU HATE WHAT YOU CAN'T COMMAND! ♫

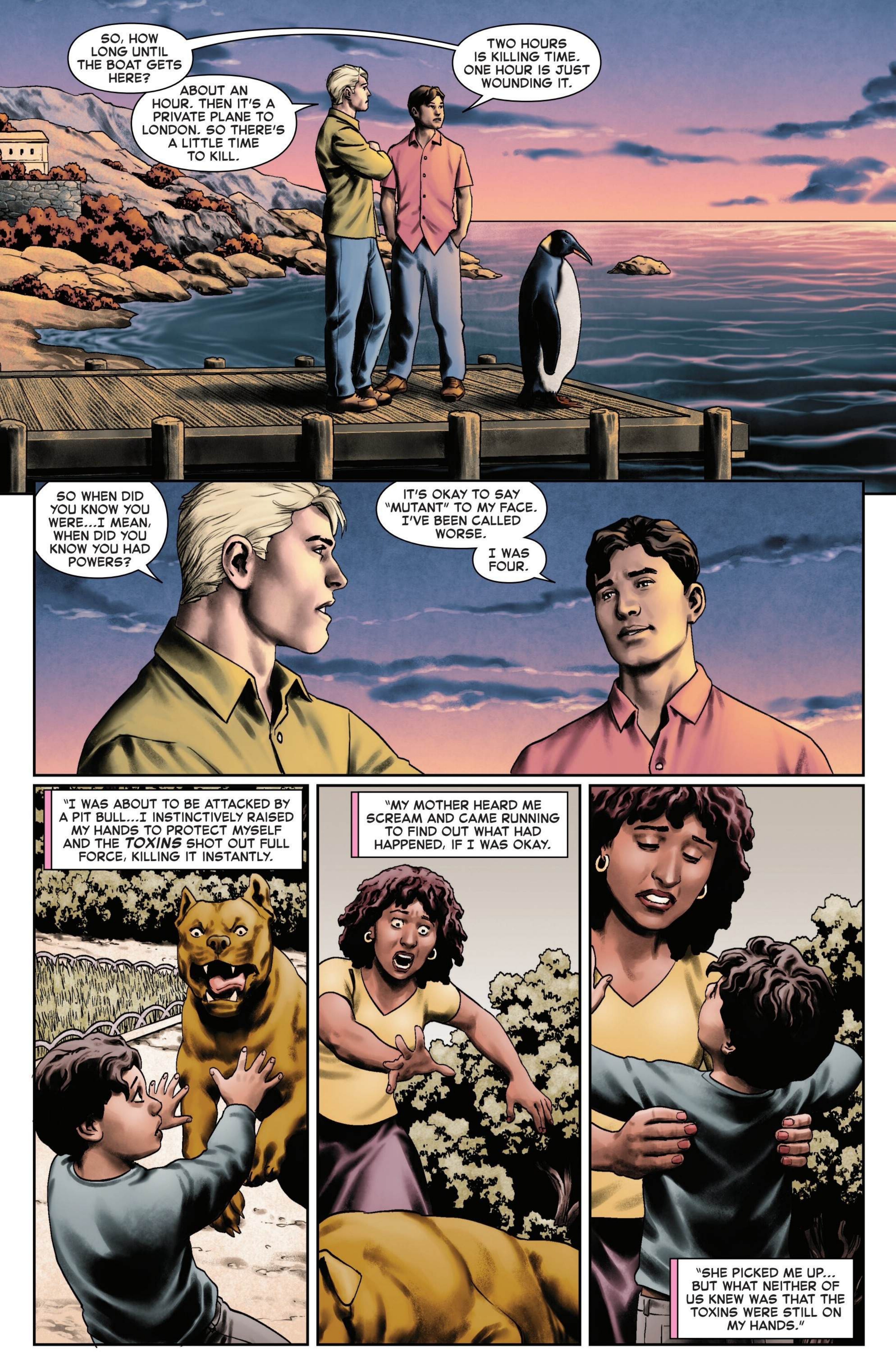

♫ "YOU HATE MY FRIENDS, YOU SAY THEY'RE WEIRD-- ♫
♩ "BUT IF LIKE ATTRACTS LIKE-- ♫
♫ "--THEN WHAT AM I? ♩
♫ "WHO AM I AND WHY AM I AND EVEN IF I KNEW--" ♫
--I KNOW YOU KNOW I KNOW ♫ IT WOULDN'T MATTER. ♫

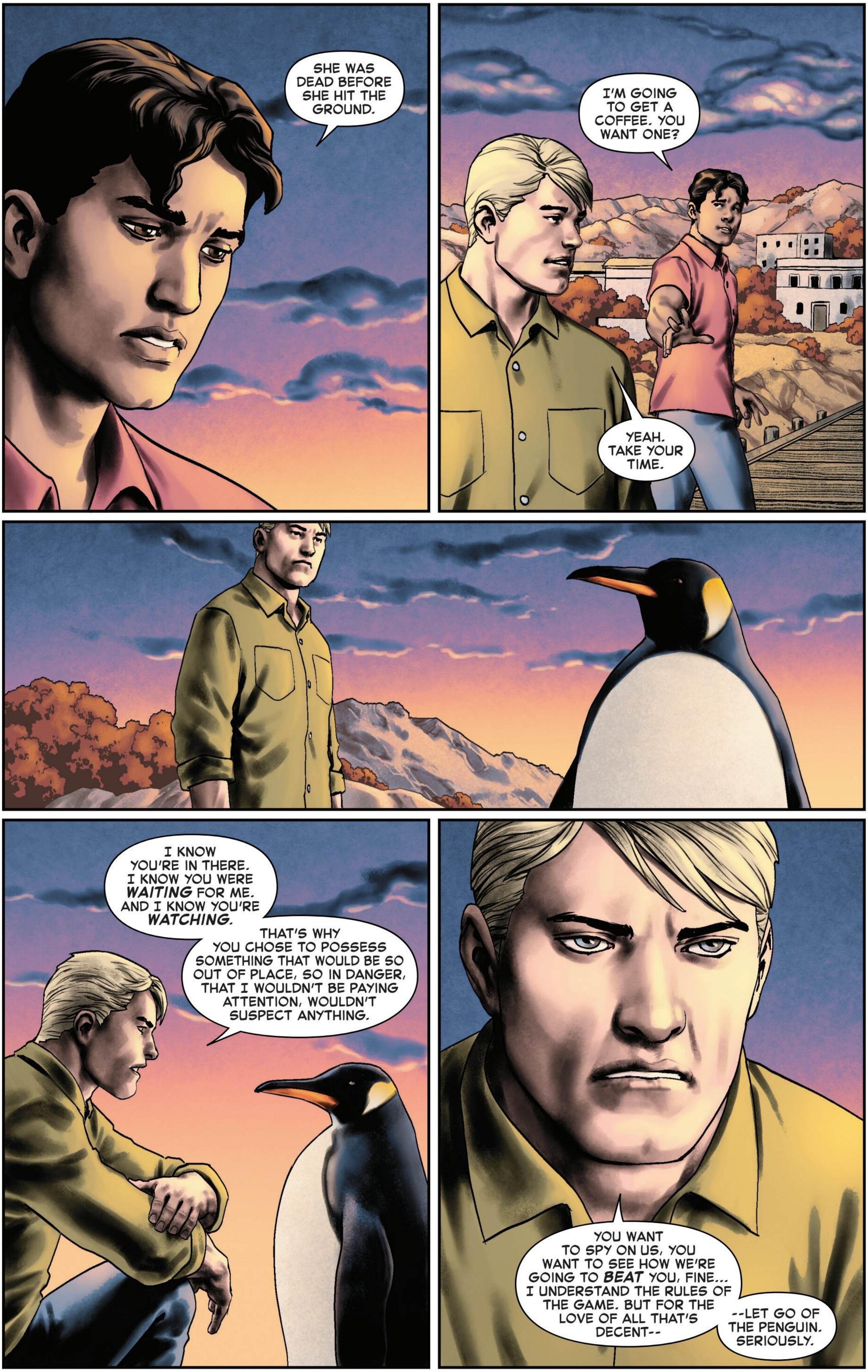

"I'M SMOTHERED BY YOUR WORDS, DROWNED BENEATH YOUR INTENTIONS.
"BUT STILL I INSIST I PERSIST I EXIST!"
BECAUSE THIS IS THE BEST I CAN HOPE FOR, THE BEST I CAN EVER EXPECT, FROM MY PRISTINE, PERFECT, POISED--
NORMAL
?
NORMAL
--NUCLEAR FAMILY.
BOOM.

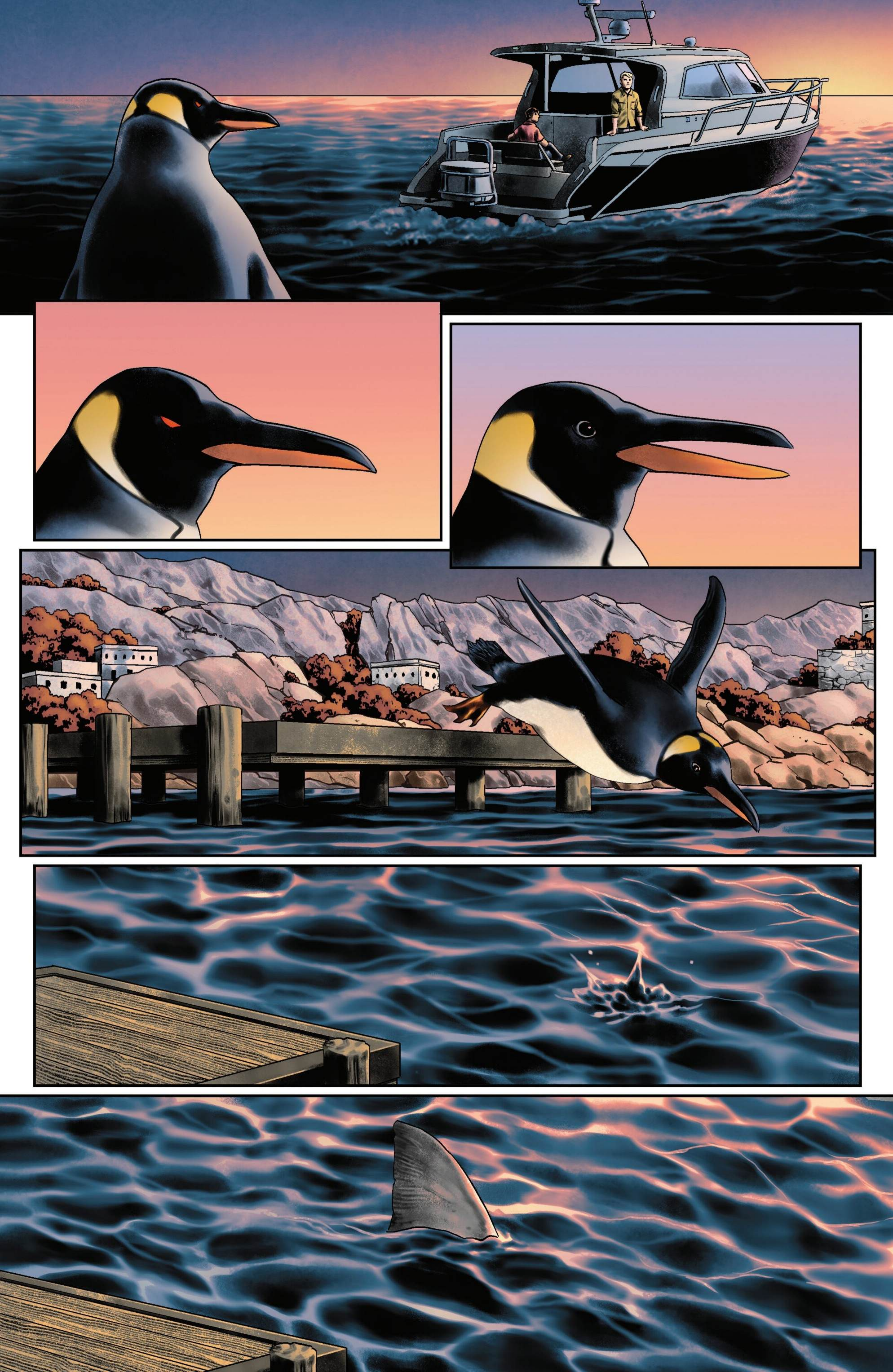

THE FRONT DOOR
"JUST KIDDING, MOM.


"MISS YOU.
THE FRONT DO
"LOVE YOU TOO.
"OKAY. TAKE CARE. BEST TO DAD.
"BUH-BYE."
CLICK!
AND--
--DISCONNECT.
CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! CLAP!


HOW'S THE HAND?
GOOD.
GOOD AS NEW. TECHNICALLY, *NEW*-NEW.
GOT A QUESTION FOR YOU.
YOU SAID THE MERCENARIES WERE POSITIONED WHERE THEY COULD KEEP AN EYE ON THE TOWN... BUT I *KNOW* WHEN I'M BEING WATCHED.
AND I DIDN'T SEE OR FEEL ANYBODY OR ANYTHING OUT THERE WHILE I WAS DRIVING INTO TOWN.
SO HOW'D THEY KNOW?
MAYBE YOU MISSED SOMETHING?
NOT WHAT I DO.
THEN I HAVE NO ANSWERS.
YOU KNOW HOW TO RIDE ONE OF THESE?
BARELY. BUT IT'S ME. IF PART OF ME FALLS OFF, WAIT A FEW MINUTES AND IT'S BACK AGAIN.
"SO REALLY, WHAT'S THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN?"


SO, HOW LONG UNTIL THE BOAT GETS HERE?
ABOUT AN HOUR. THEN IT'S A PRIVATE PLANE TO LONDON. SO THERE'S A LITTLE TIME TO KILL.
TWO HOURS IS KILLING TIME. ONE HOUR IS JUST WOUNDING IT.
SO WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WERE...I MEAN, WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU HAD POWERS?
IT'S OKAY TO SAY "MUTANT" TO MY FACE. I'VE BEEN CALLED WORSE.
I WAS FOUR.
"I WAS ABOUT TO BE ATTACKED BY A PIT BULL...I INSTINCTIVELY RAISED MY HANDS TO PROTECT MYSELF AND THE *TOXINS* SHOT OUT FULL FORCE, KILLING IT INSTANTLY.
"MY MOTHER HEARD ME SCREAM AND CAME RUNNING TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED, IF I WAS OKAY.
"SHE PICKED ME UP... BUT WHAT NEITHER OF US KNEW WAS THAT THE TOXINS WERE STILL ON MY HANDS."


SHE WAS DEAD BEFORE SHE HIT THE GROUND.
I'M GOING TO GET A COFFEE. YOU WANT ONE?
YEAH. TAKE YOUR TIME.
I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE. I KNOW YOU WERE *WAITING* FOR ME. AND I KNOW YOU'RE *WATCHING.*
THAT'S WHY YOU CHOSE TO POSSESS SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE SO OUT OF PLACE, SO IN DANGER, THAT I WOULDN'T BE PAYING ATTENTION, WOULDN'T SUSPECT ANYTHING.
YOU WANT TO SPY ON US, YOU WANT TO SEE HOW WE'RE GOING TO *BEAT* YOU, FINE... I UNDERSTAND THE RULES OF THE GAME. BUT FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THAT'S DECENT--
--LET GO OF THE PENGUIN. SERIOUSLY.



CONFIDENTIAL
WHO ARE THE CHANGE AGENTS?
CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS
CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS
TC

CAPTAIN AMERICA

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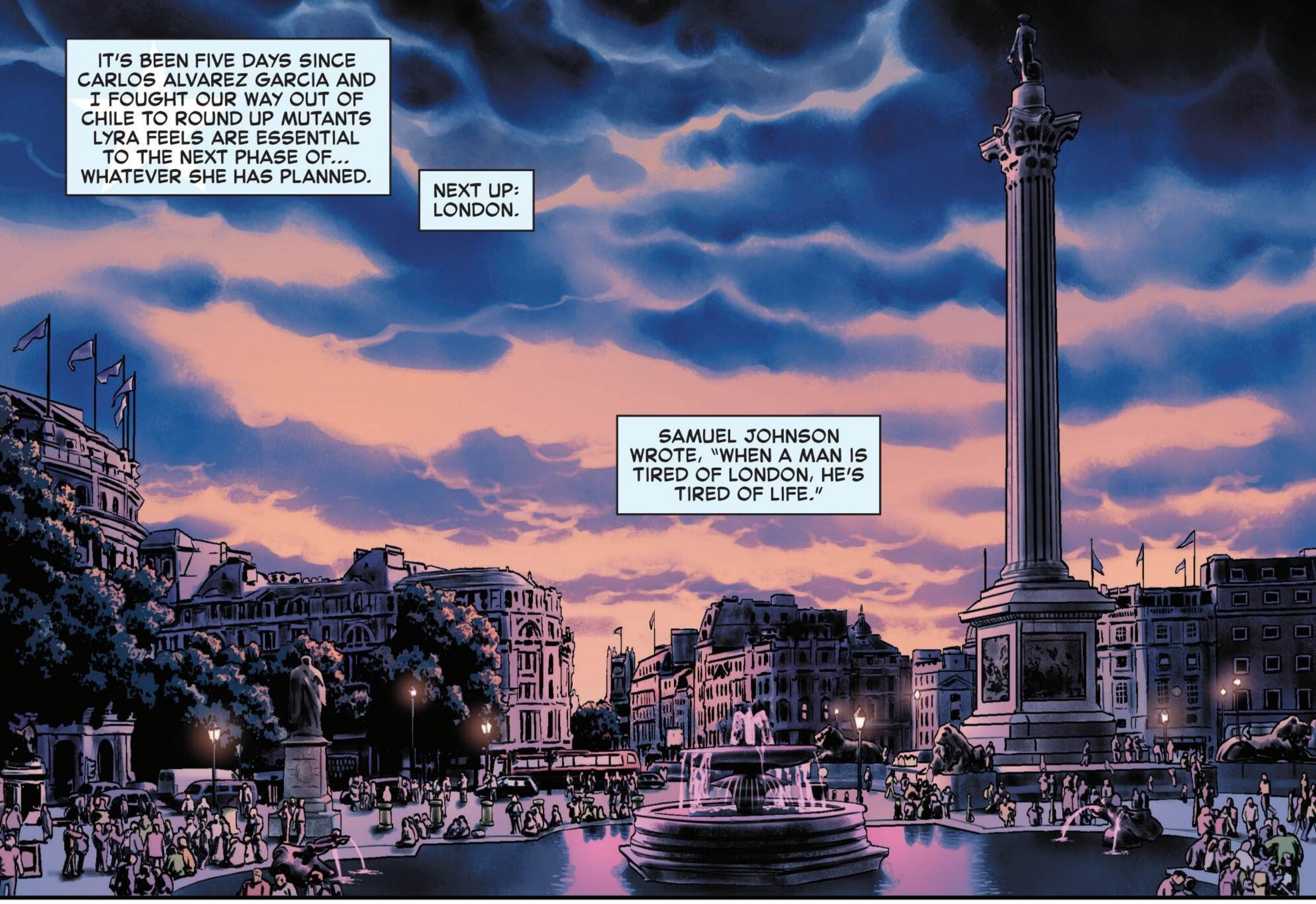
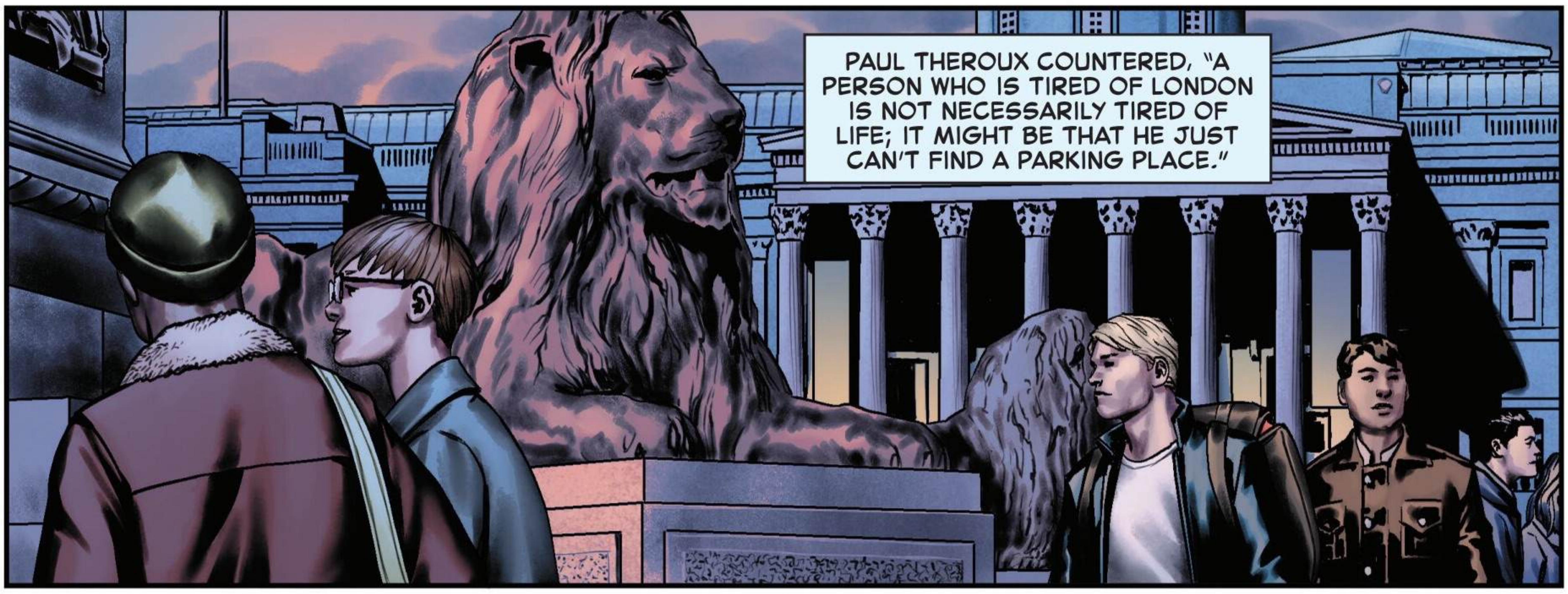
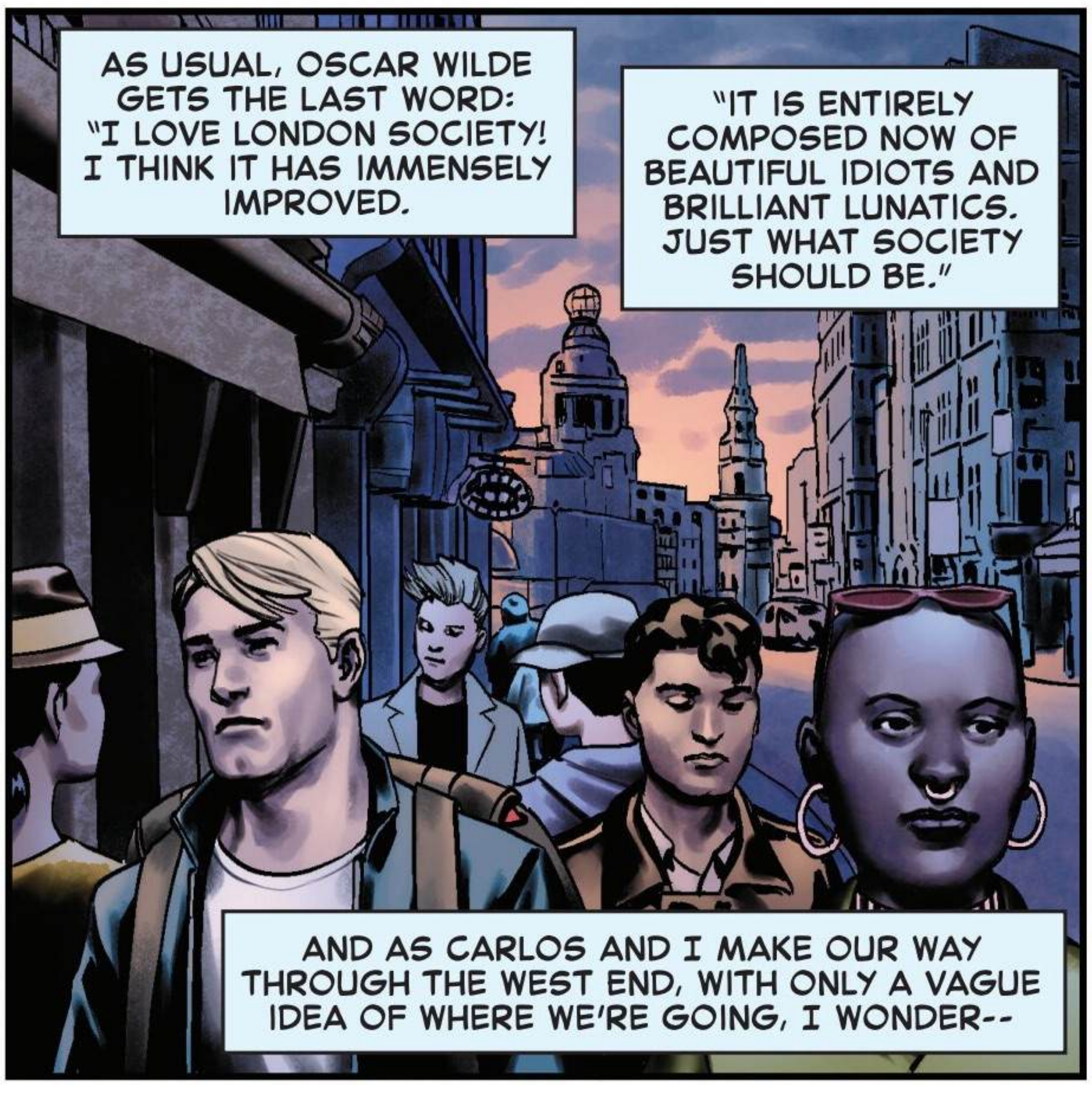
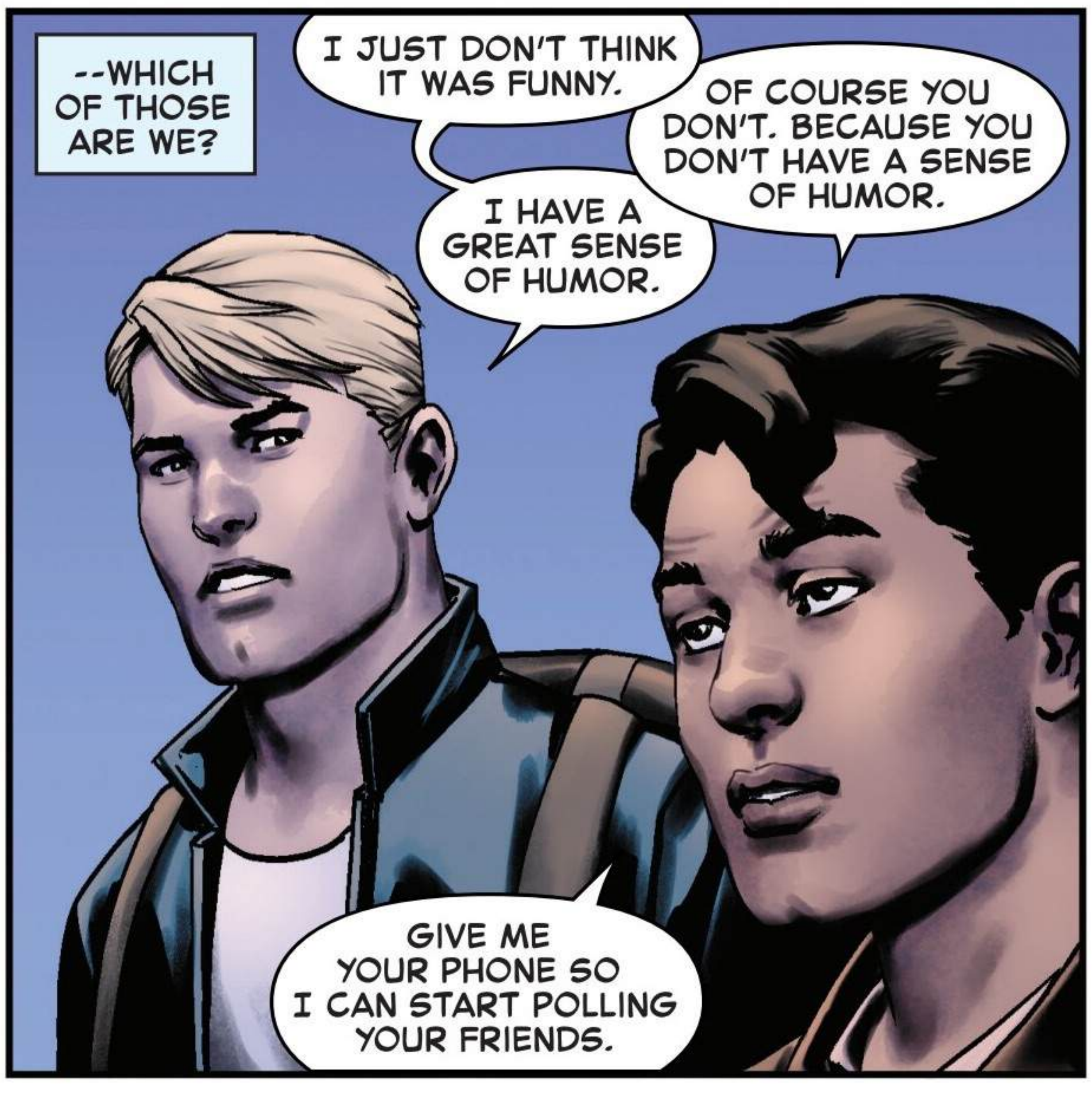
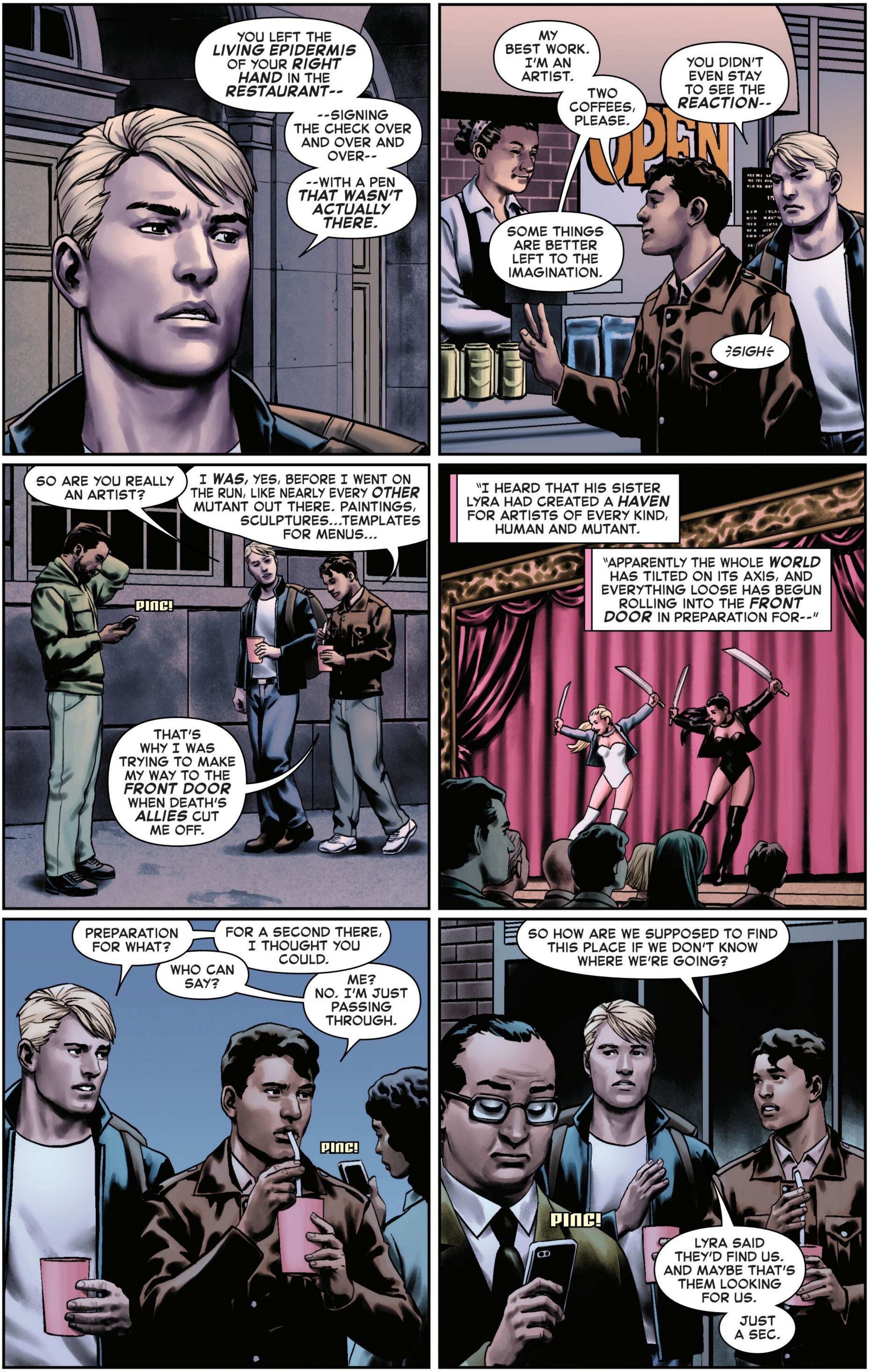
REVELATIONS FROM THE WEST END

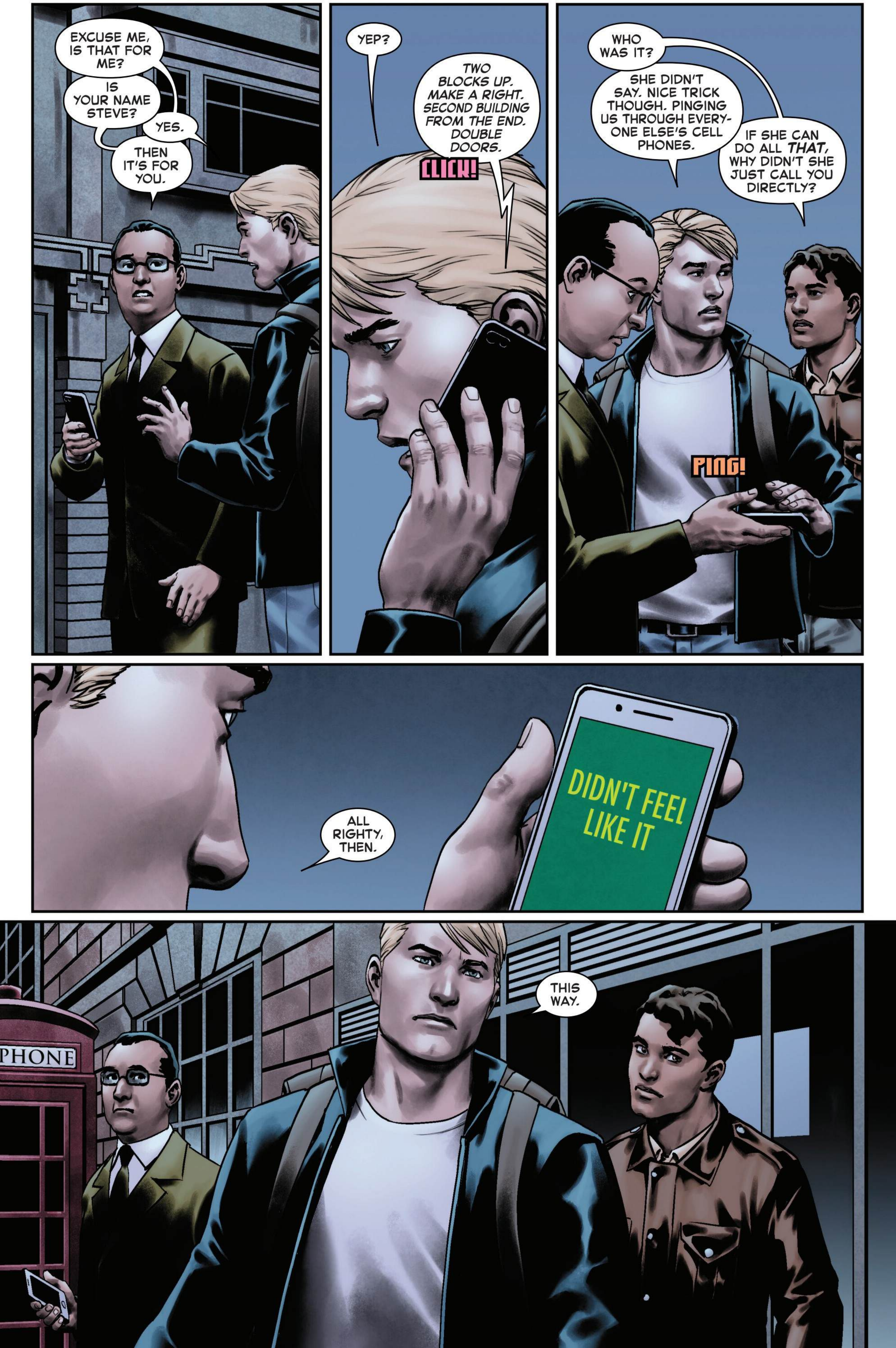

IT'S BEEN FIVE DAYS SINCE CARLOS ALVAREZ GARCIA AND I FOUGHT OUR WAY OUT OF CHILE TO ROUND UP MUTANTS LYRA FEELS ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE NEXT PHASE OF... WHATEVER SHE HAS PLANNED.
NEXT UP: LONDON.
SAMUEL JOHNSON WROTE, "WHEN A MAN IS TIRED OF LONDON, HE'S TIRED OF LIFE."

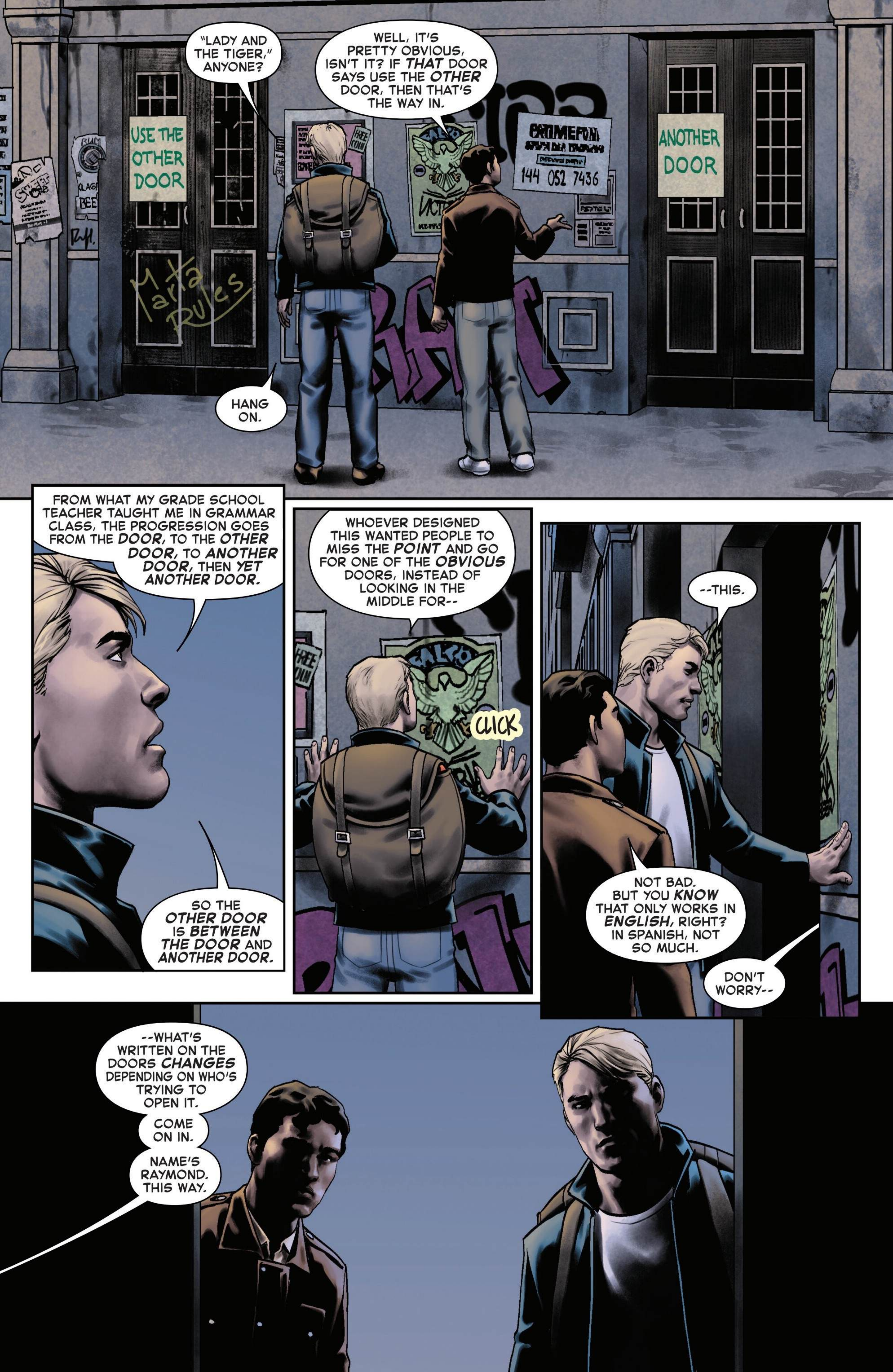

PAUL THEROUX COUNTERED, "A PERSON WHO IS TIRED OF LONDON IS NOT NECESSARILY TIRED OF LIFE; IT MIGHT BE THAT HE JUST CAN'T FIND A PARKING PLACE."

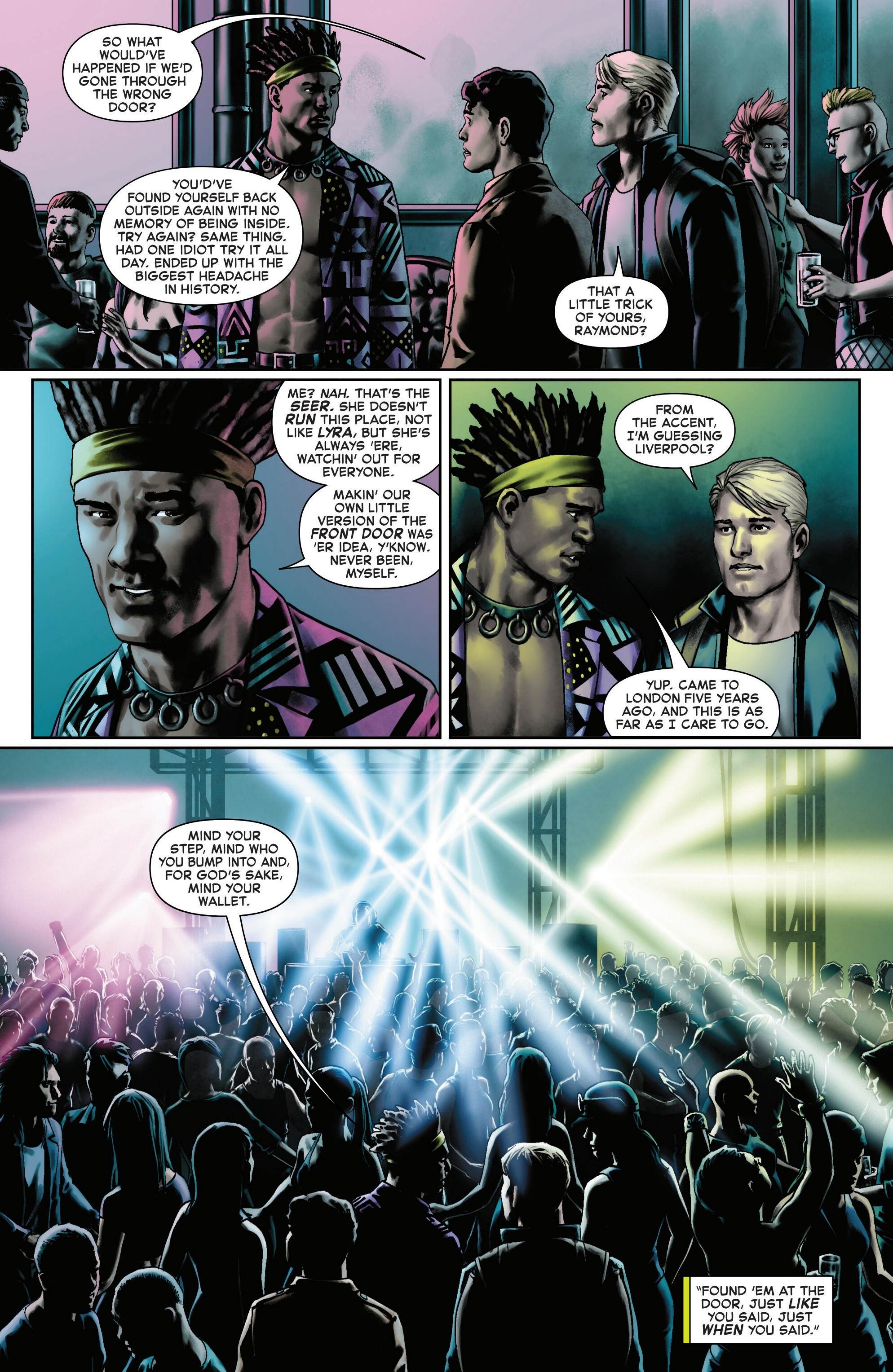

AS USUAL, OSCAR WILDE GETS THE LAST WORD: "I LOVE LONDON SOCIETY! I THINK IT HAS IMMENSELY IMPROVED.
"IT IS ENTIRELY COMPOSED NOW OF BEAUTIFUL IDIOTS AND BRILLIANT LUNATICS. JUST WHAT SOCIETY SHOULD BE."
AND AS CARLOS AND I MAKE OUR WAY THROUGH THE WEST END, WITH ONLY A VAGUE IDEA OF WHERE WE'RE GOING, I WONDER--

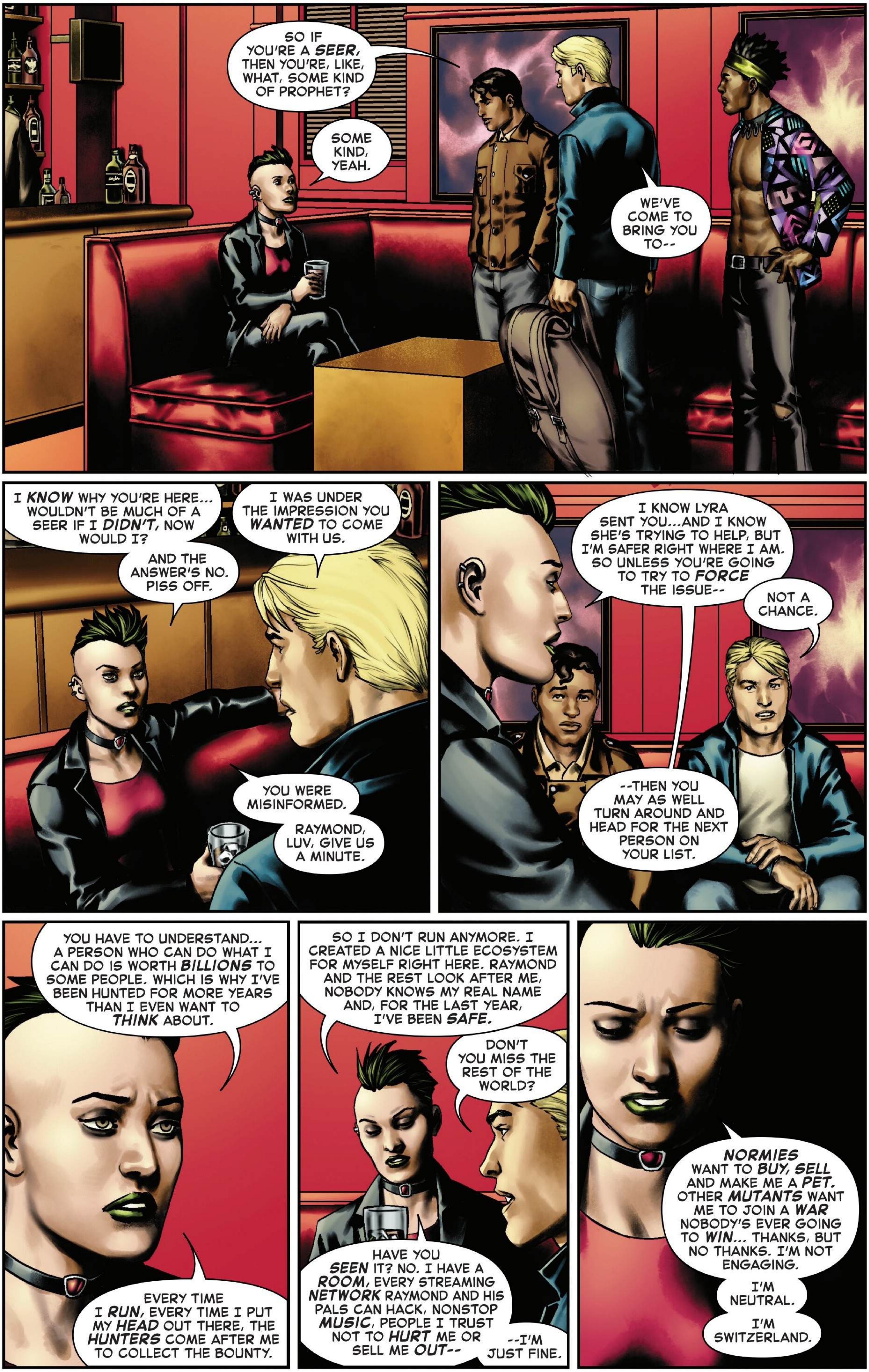

--WHICH OF THOSE ARE WE?
I JUST DON'T THINK IT WAS FUNNY.
OF COURSE YOU DON'T. BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR.
I HAVE A GREAT SENSE OF HUMOR.
GIVE ME YOUR PHONE SO I CAN START POLLING YOUR FRIENDS.

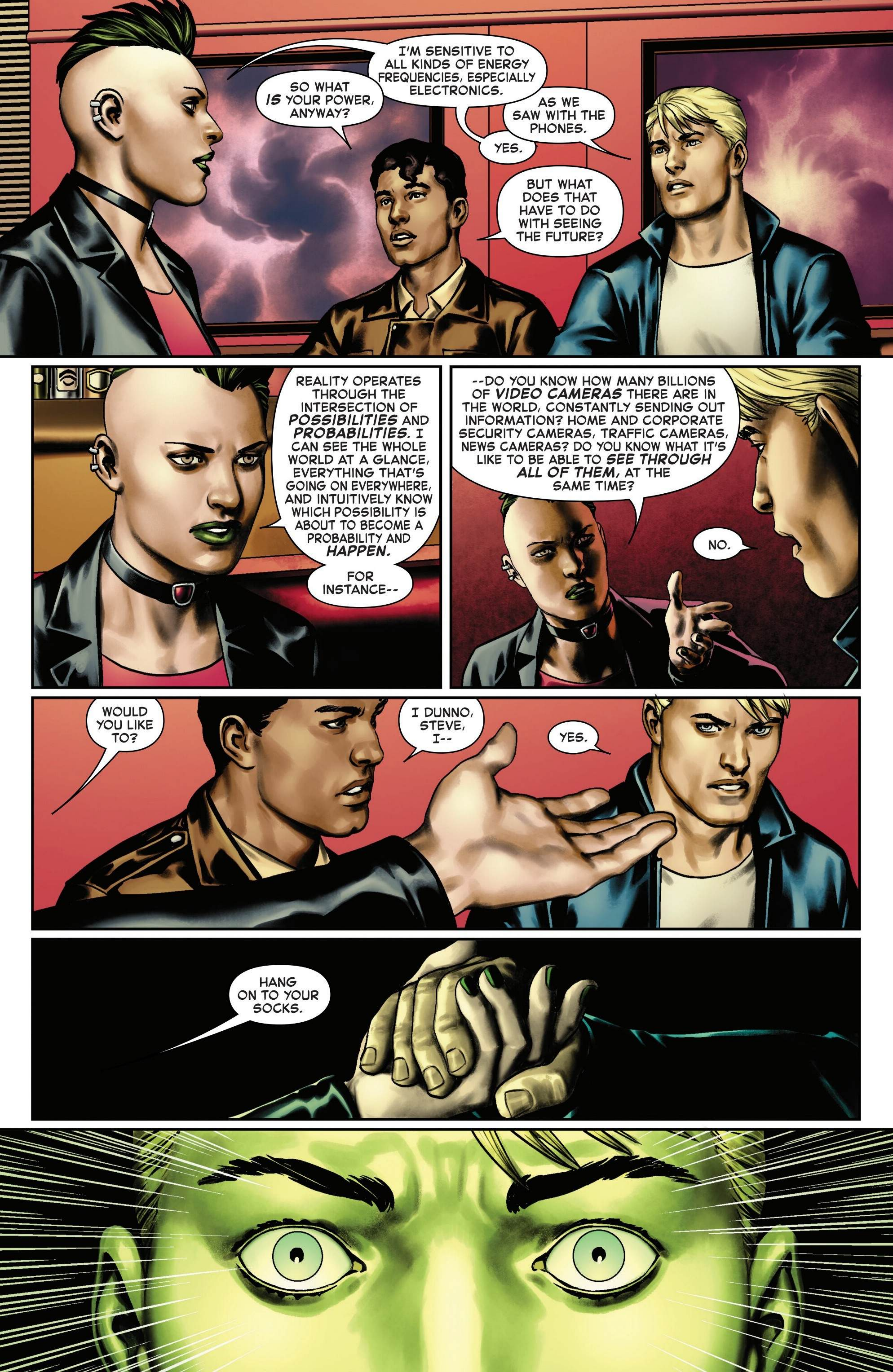

YOU LEFT THE ***LIVING EPIDERMIS*** OF YOUR ***RIGHT HAND*** IN THE ***RESTAURANT***--
--SIGNING THE CHECK OVER AND OVER AND OVER--
--WITH A PEN ***THAT WASN'T ACTUALLY THERE.***
MY BEST WORK. I'M AN ARTIST.
TWO COFFEES, PLEASE.
SOME THINGS ARE BETTER LEFT TO THE IMAGINATION.
OPEN
YOU DIDN'T EVEN STAY TO SEE THE ***REACTION***--
SIGH
SO ARE YOU REALLY AN ARTIST?
I ***WAS,*** YES, BEFORE I WENT ON THE RUN, LIKE NEARLY EVERY ***OTHER*** MUTANT OUT THERE. PAINTINGS, SCULPTURES...TEMPLATES FOR MENUS...
PING!
THAT'S WHY I WAS TRYING TO MAKE MY WAY TO THE ***FRONT DOOR*** WHEN DEATH'S ***ALLIES*** CUT ME OFF.
"I HEARD THAT HIS SISTER LYRA HAD CREATED A ***HAVEN*** FOR ARTISTS OF EVERY KIND, HUMAN AND MUTANT.
"APPARENTLY THE WHOLE ***WORLD*** HAS TILTED ON ITS AXIS, AND EVERYTHING LOOSE HAS BEGUN ROLLING INTO THE ***FRONT DOOR*** IN PREPARATION FOR--"
PREPARATION FOR WHAT?
WHO CAN SAY?
FOR A SECOND THERE, I THOUGHT YOU COULD.
ME? NO. I'M JUST PASSING THROUGH.
PING!
SO HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO FIND THIS PLACE IF WE DON'T KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING?
PING!
LYRA SAID THEY'D FIND US. AND MAYBE THAT'S THEM LOOKING FOR US.
JUST A SEC.

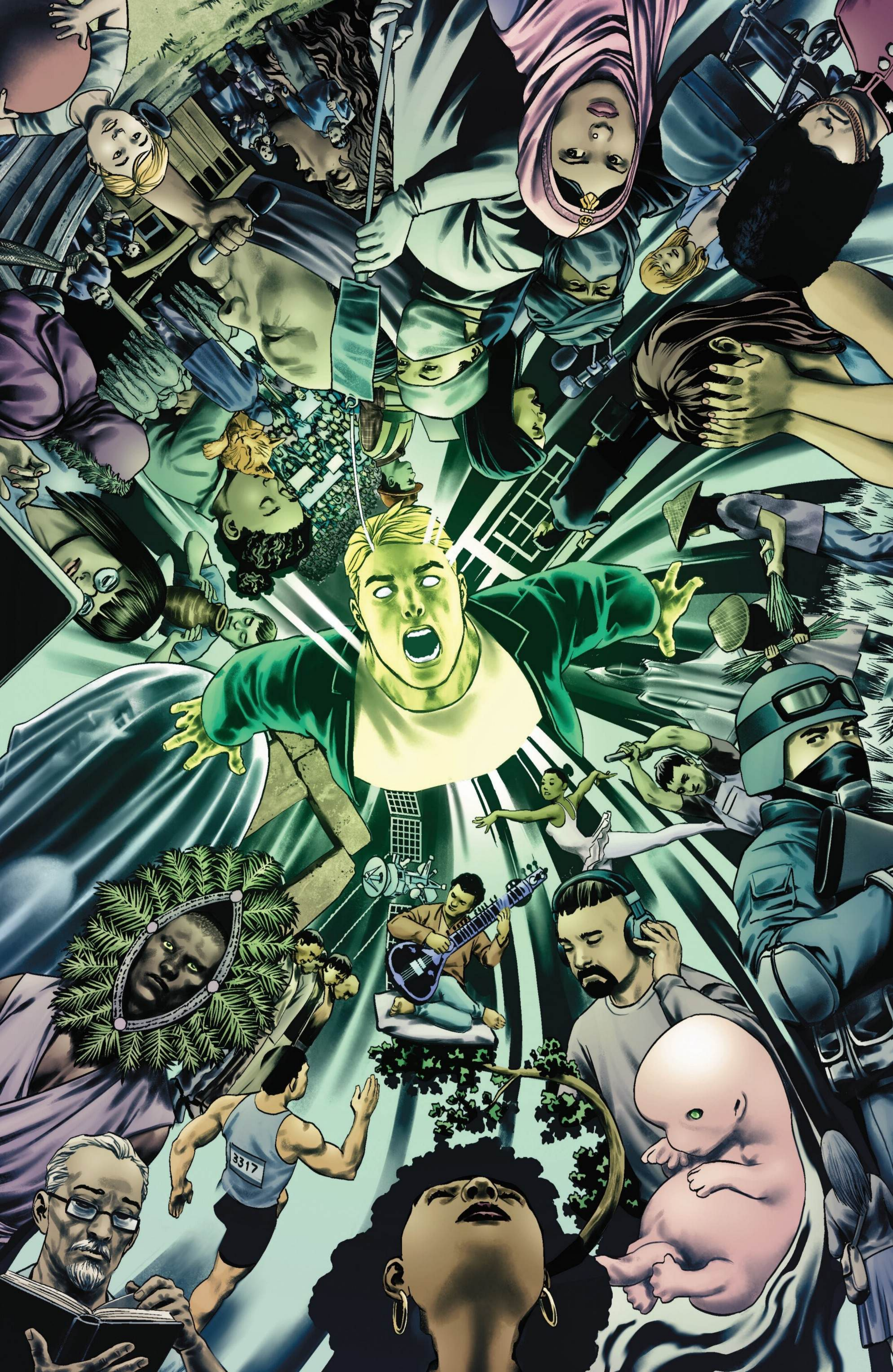

EXCUSE ME, IS THAT FOR ME?
IS YOUR NAME STEVE?
YES.
THEN IT'S FOR YOU.
YEP?
TWO BLOCKS UP. MAKE A RIGHT. SECOND BUILDING FROM THE END. DOUBLE DOORS.
CLICK!
WHO WAS IT?
SHE DIDN'T SAY. NICE TRICK THOUGH. PINGING US THROUGH EVERYONE ELSE'S CELL PHONES.
IF SHE CAN DO ALL *THAT,* WHY DIDN'T SHE JUST CALL YOU DIRECTLY?
PING!
ALL RIGHTY, THEN.
DIDN'T FEEL LIKE IT
THIS WAY.
PHONE


USE THE OTHER DOOR
Marta Rules
"LADY AND THE TIGER," ANYONE?
WELL, IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS, ISN'T IT? IF *THAT* DOOR SAYS USE THE *OTHER* DOOR, THEN THAT'S THE WAY IN.
144 052 7436
ANOTHER DOOR
HANG ON.
FROM WHAT MY GRADE SCHOOL TEACHER TAUGHT ME IN GRAMMAR CLASS, THE PROGRESSION GOES FROM THE *DOOR*, TO THE *OTHER DOOR*, TO *ANOTHER DOOR*, THEN *YET ANOTHER DOOR.*
SO THE *OTHER DOOR* IS *BETWEEN THE DOOR* AND *ANOTHER DOOR.*
WHOEVER DESIGNED THIS WANTED PEOPLE TO MISS THE *POINT* AND GO FOR ONE OF THE *OBVIOUS* DOORS, INSTEAD OF LOOKING IN THE MIDDLE FOR--
FREE COIN
CLICK
--THIS.
NOT BAD. BUT YOU *KNOW* THAT ONLY WORKS IN *ENGLISH,* RIGHT? IN SPANISH, NOT SO MUCH.
DON'T WORRY--
--WHAT'S WRITTEN ON THE DOORS *CHANGES* DEPENDING ON WHO'S TRYING TO OPEN IT.
COME ON IN.
NAME'S RAYMOND. THIS WAY.


SO WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF WE'D GONE THROUGH THE WRONG DOOR?
YOU'D'VE FOUND YOURSELF BACK OUTSIDE AGAIN WITH NO MEMORY OF BEING INSIDE. TRY AGAIN? SAME THING. HAD ONE IDIOT TRY IT ALL DAY. ENDED UP WITH THE BIGGEST HEADACHE IN HISTORY.
THAT A LITTLE TRICK OF YOURS, RAYMOND?
ME? *NAH.* THAT'S THE ***SEER.*** SHE DOESN'T ***RUN*** THIS PLACE, NOT LIKE ***LYRA,*** BUT SHE'S ALWAYS 'ERE, WATCHIN' OUT FOR EVERYONE.
MAKIN' OUR OWN LITTLE VERSION OF THE ***FRONT DOOR*** WAS 'ER IDEA, Y'KNOW. NEVER BEEN, MYSELF.
FROM THE ACCENT, I'M GUESSING LIVERPOOL?
YUP. CAME TO LONDON FIVE YEARS AGO, AND THIS IS AS FAR AS I CARE TO GO.
MIND YOUR STEP, MIND WHO YOU BUMP INTO AND, FOR GOD'S SAKE, MIND YOUR WALLET.
"FOUND 'EM AT THE DOOR, JUST ***LIKE*** YOU SAID, JUST ***WHEN*** YOU SAID."


SO IF YOU'RE A *SEER*, THEN YOU'RE, LIKE, WHAT, SOME KIND OF PROPHET?
SOME KIND, YEAH.
WE'VE COME TO BRING YOU TO--
I *KNOW* WHY YOU'RE HERE... WOULDN'T BE MUCH OF A SEER IF I *DIDN'T*, NOW WOULD I?
AND THE ANSWER'S NO. PISS OFF.
I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION YOU *WANTED* TO COME WITH US.
YOU WERE *MISINFORMED*.
RAYMOND, LUV, GIVE US A MINUTE.
I KNOW LYRA SENT YOU...AND I KNOW SHE'S TRYING TO HELP, BUT I'M SAFER RIGHT WHERE I AM. SO UNLESS YOU'RE GOING TO TRY TO *FORCE* THE ISSUE--
NOT A CHANCE.
--THEN YOU MAY AS WELL TURN AROUND AND HEAD FOR THE NEXT PERSON ON YOUR LIST.
YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND... A PERSON WHO CAN DO WHAT I CAN DO IS WORTH *BILLIONS* TO SOME PEOPLE. WHICH IS WHY I'VE BEEN HUNTED FOR MORE YEARS THAN I EVEN WANT TO *THINK* ABOUT.
EVERY TIME I *RUN*, EVERY TIME I PUT MY *HEAD* OUT THERE, THE *HUNTERS* COME AFTER ME TO COLLECT THE BOUNTY.
SO I DON'T RUN ANYMORE. I CREATED A NICE LITTLE ECOSYSTEM FOR MYSELF RIGHT HERE. RAYMOND AND THE REST LOOK AFTER ME, NOBODY KNOWS MY REAL NAME AND, FOR THE LAST YEAR, I'VE BEEN *SAFE*.
DON'T YOU MISS THE REST OF THE WORLD?
HAVE YOU *SEEN* IT? NO. I HAVE A *ROOM*, EVERY STREAMING *NETWORK* RAYMOND AND HIS PALS CAN HACK, NONSTOP *MUSIC*, PEOPLE I TRUST NOT TO *HURT* ME OR SELL ME *OUT*--
--I'M JUST FINE.
NORMIES WANT TO *BUY*, *SELL* AND MAKE ME A *PET*. OTHER *MUTANTS* WANT ME TO JOIN A *WAR* NOBODY'S EVER GOING TO *WIN*... THANKS, BUT NO THANKS. I'M NOT ENGAGING.
I'M NEUTRAL.
I'M SWITZERLAND.


SO WHAT *IS* YOUR POWER, ANYWAY?
I'M SENSITIVE TO ALL KINDS OF ENERGY FREQUENCIES, ESPECIALLY ELECTRONICS.
AS WE SAW WITH THE PHONES.
YES.
BUT WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH SEEING THE FUTURE?
REALITY OPERATES THROUGH THE INTERSECTION OF ***POSSIBILITIES*** AND ***PROBABILITIES.*** I CAN SEE THE WHOLE WORLD AT A GLANCE, EVERYTHING THAT'S GOING ON EVERYWHERE, AND INTUITIVELY KNOW WHICH POSSIBILITY IS ABOUT TO BECOME A PROBABILITY AND ***HAPPEN.***
FOR INSTANCE--
--DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY BILLIONS OF ***VIDEO CAMERAS*** THERE ARE IN THE WORLD, CONSTANTLY SENDING OUT INFORMATION? HOME AND CORPORATE SECURITY CAMERAS, TRAFFIC CAMERAS, NEWS CAMERAS? DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE ABLE TO ***SEE THROUGH ALL OF THEM,*** AT THE SAME TIME?
NO.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO?
I DUNNO, STEVE, I--
YES.
HANG ON TO YOUR SOCKS.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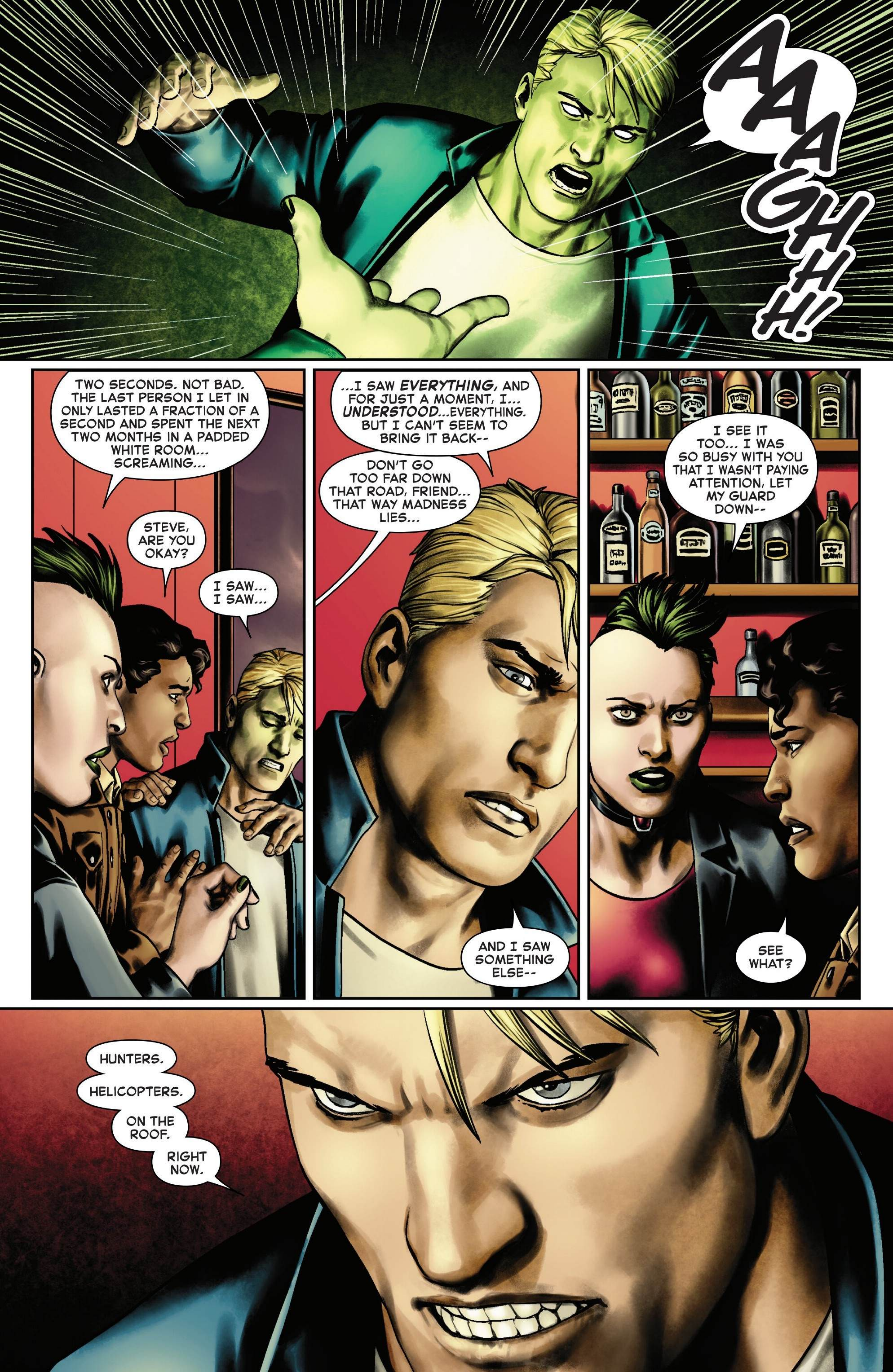
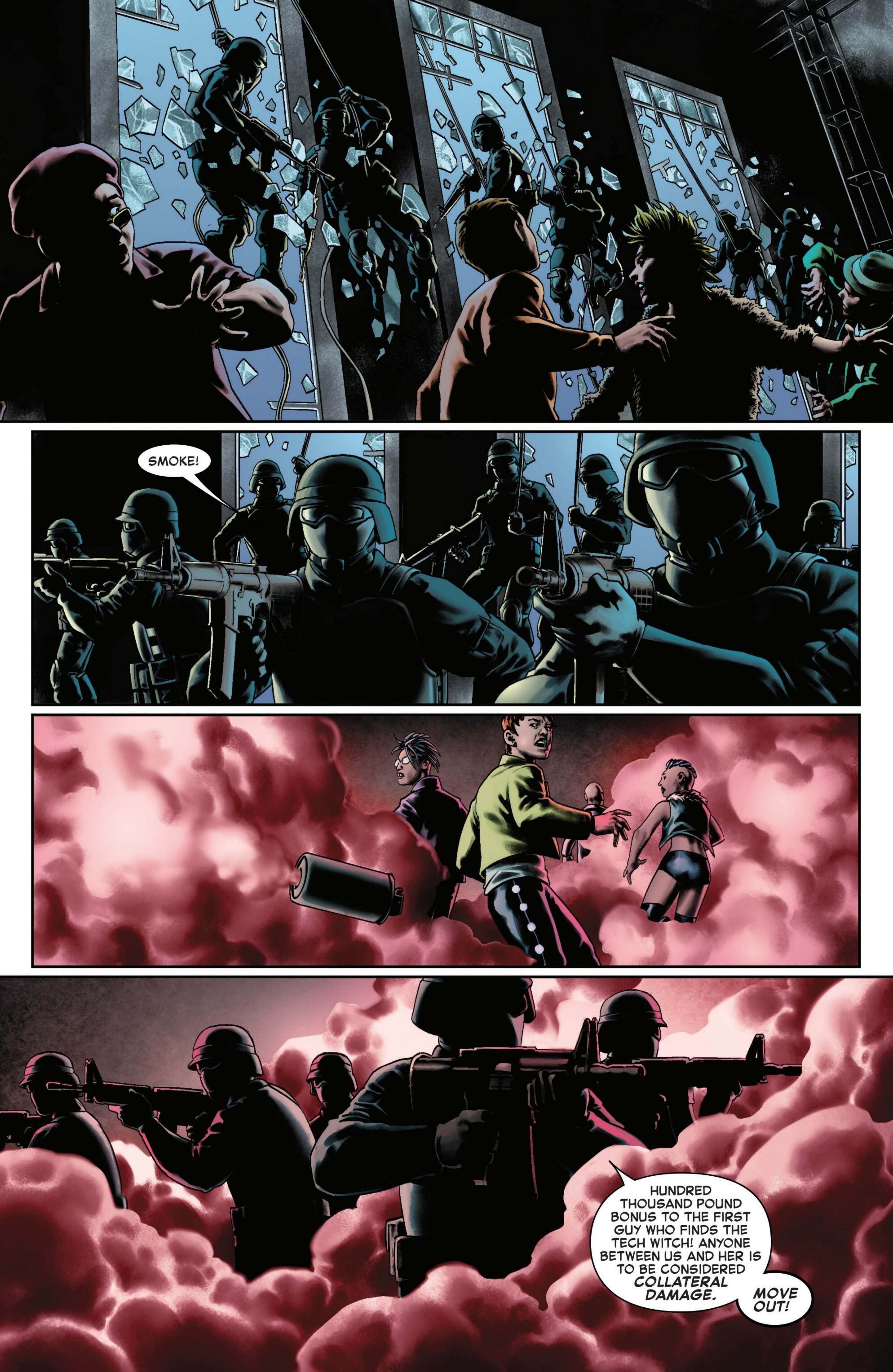
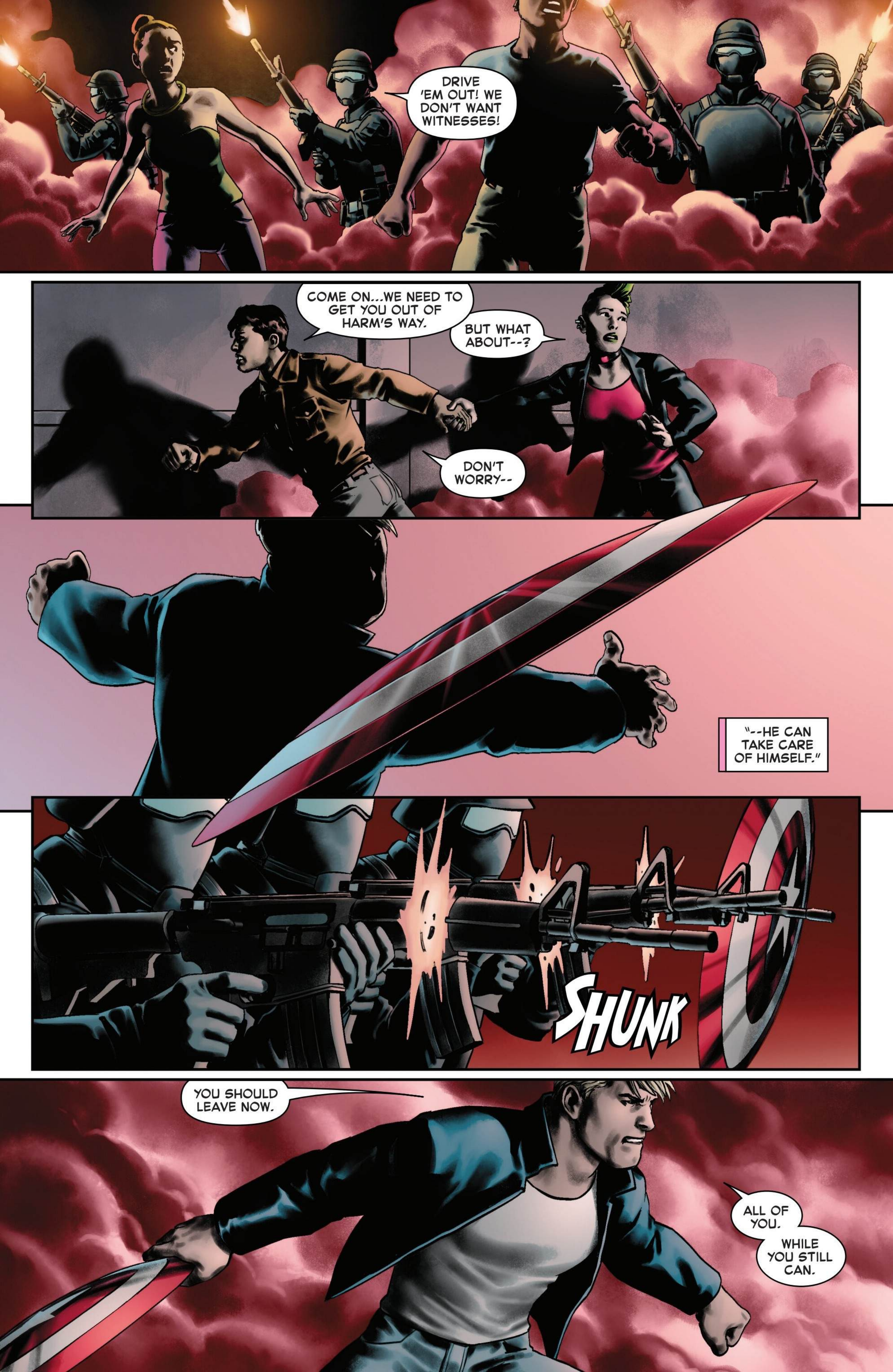
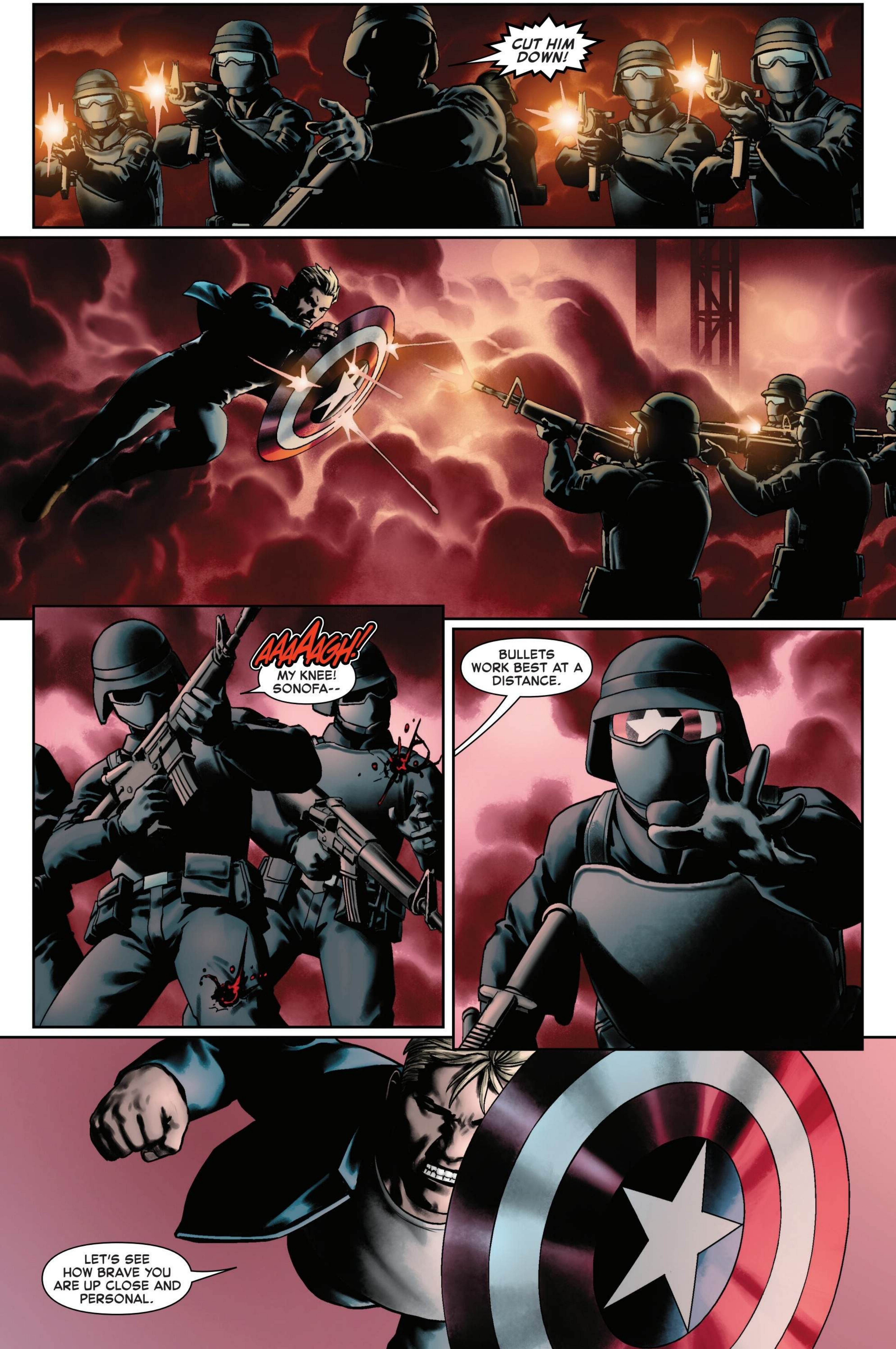
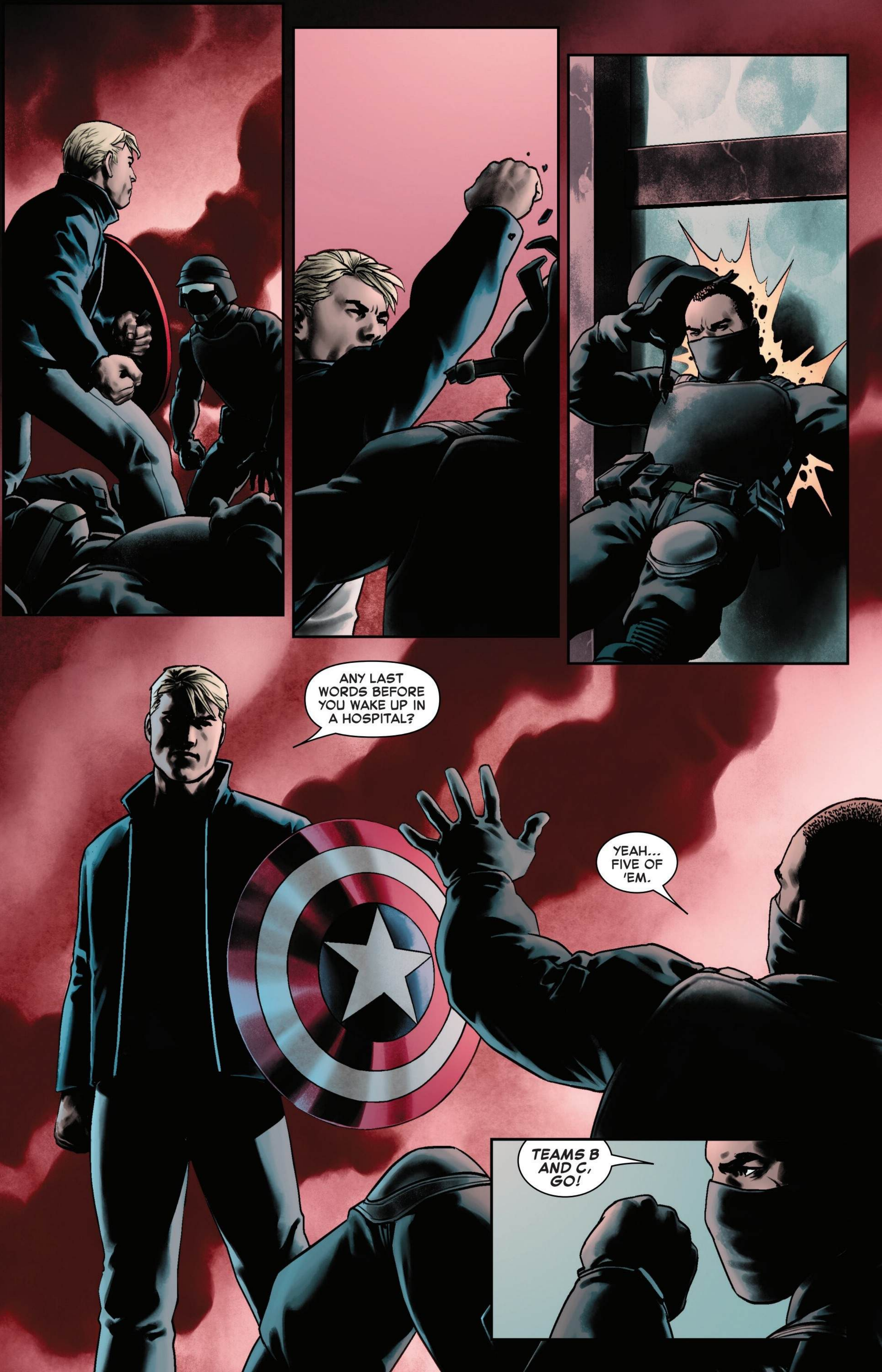
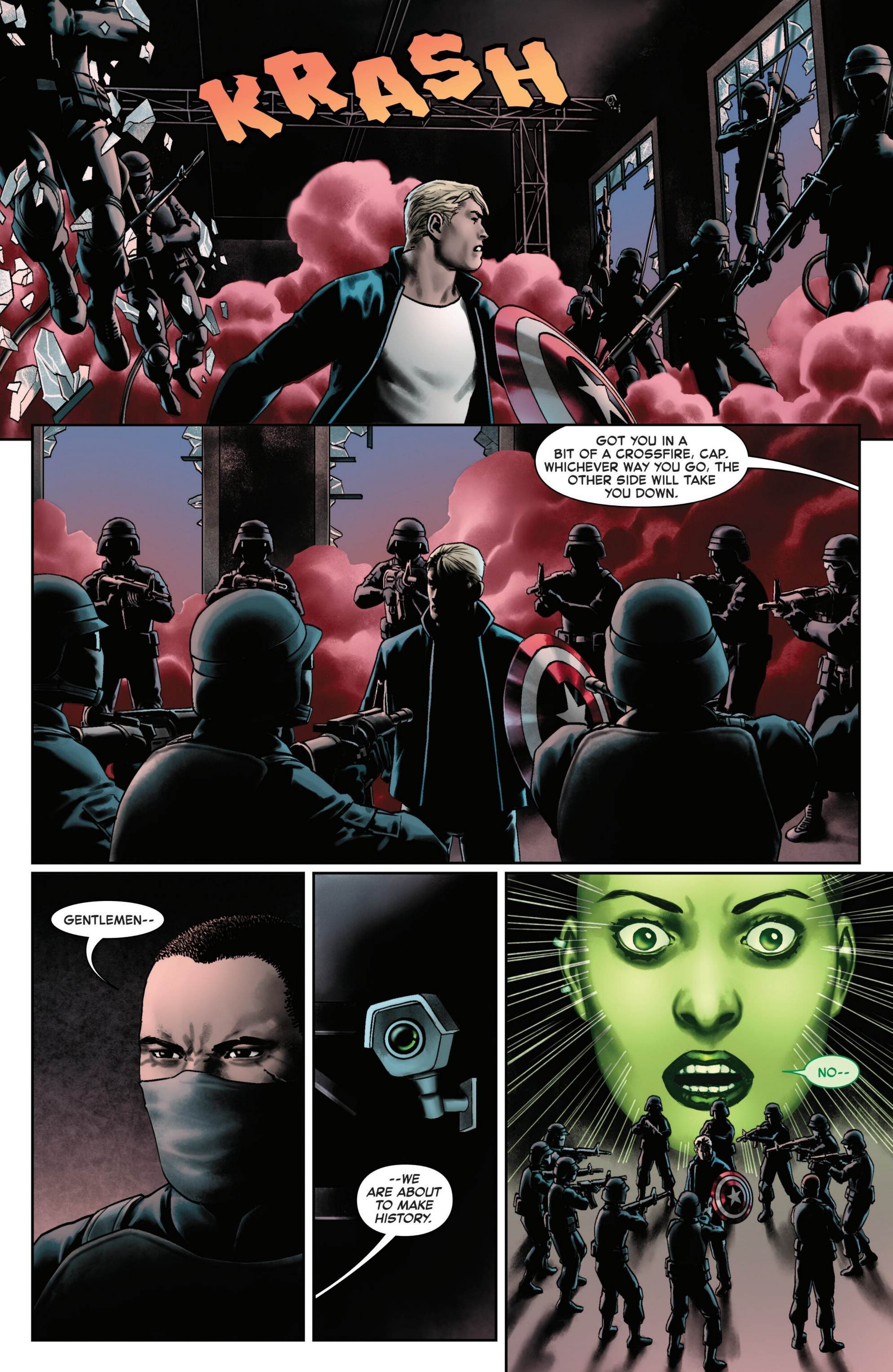

AAAGHHH!
TWO SECONDS. NOT BAD. THE LAST PERSON I LET IN ONLY LASTED A FRACTION OF A SECOND AND SPENT THE NEXT TWO MONTHS IN A PADDED WHITE ROOM... SCREAMING...
STEVE, ARE YOU OKAY?
I SAW... I SAW...
...I SAW *EVERYTHING,* AND FOR JUST A MOMENT, I... *UNDERSTOOD*...EVERYTHING. BUT I CAN'T SEEM TO BRING IT BACK--
DON'T GO TOO FAR DOWN THAT ROAD, FRIEND... THAT WAY MADNESS LIES...
AND I SAW SOMETHING ELSE--
I SEE IT TOO... I WAS SO BUSY WITH YOU THAT I WASN'T PAYING ATTENTION, LET MY GUARD DOWN--
SEE WHAT?
HUNTERS.
HELICOPTERS.
ON THE ROOF.
RIGHT NOW.

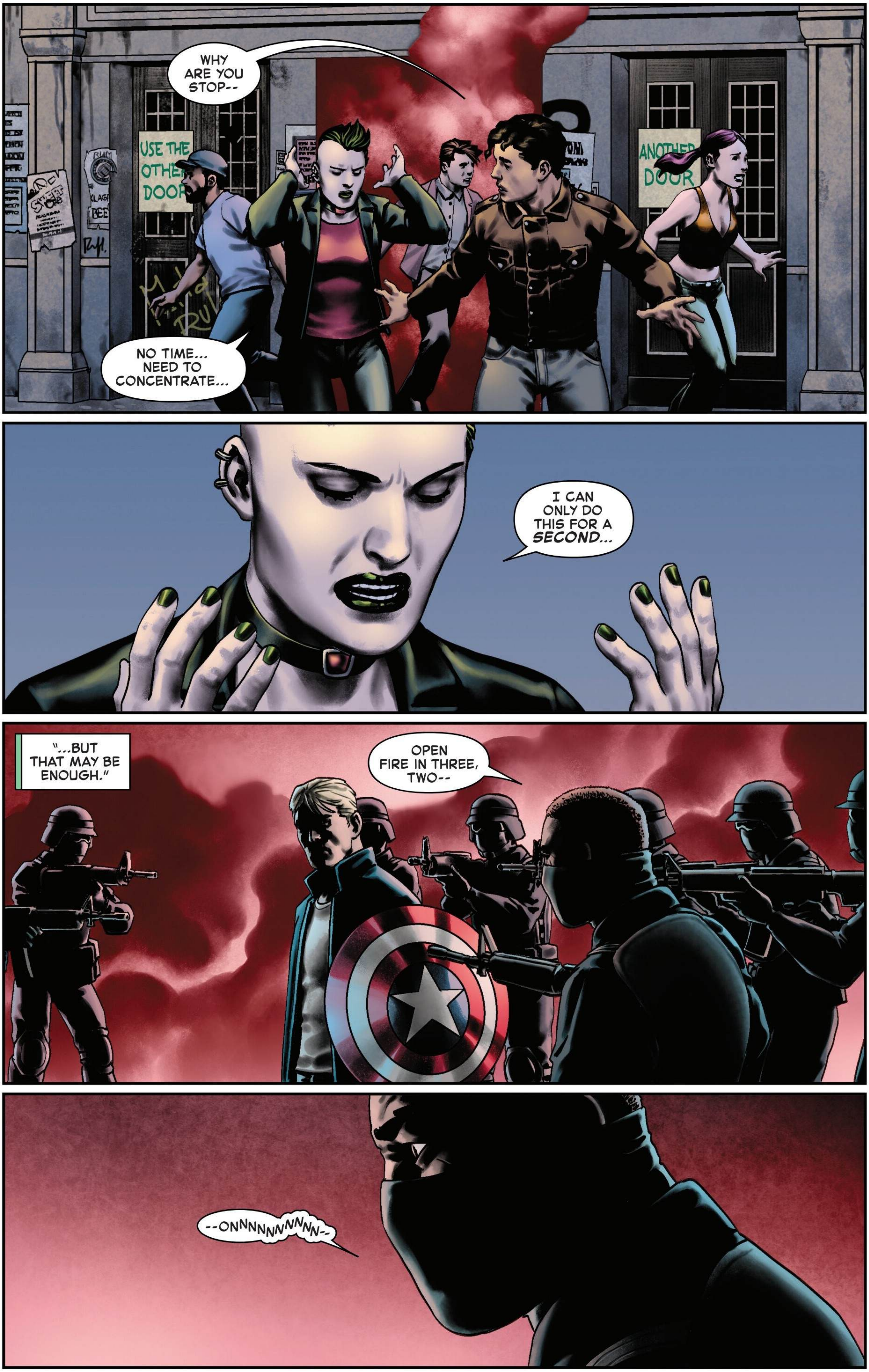

SMOKE!
HUNDRED THOUSAND POUND BONUS TO THE FIRST GUY WHO FINDS THE TECH WITCH! ANYONE BETWEEN US AND HER IS TO BE CONSIDERED *COLLATERAL DAMAGE.*
MOVE OUT!

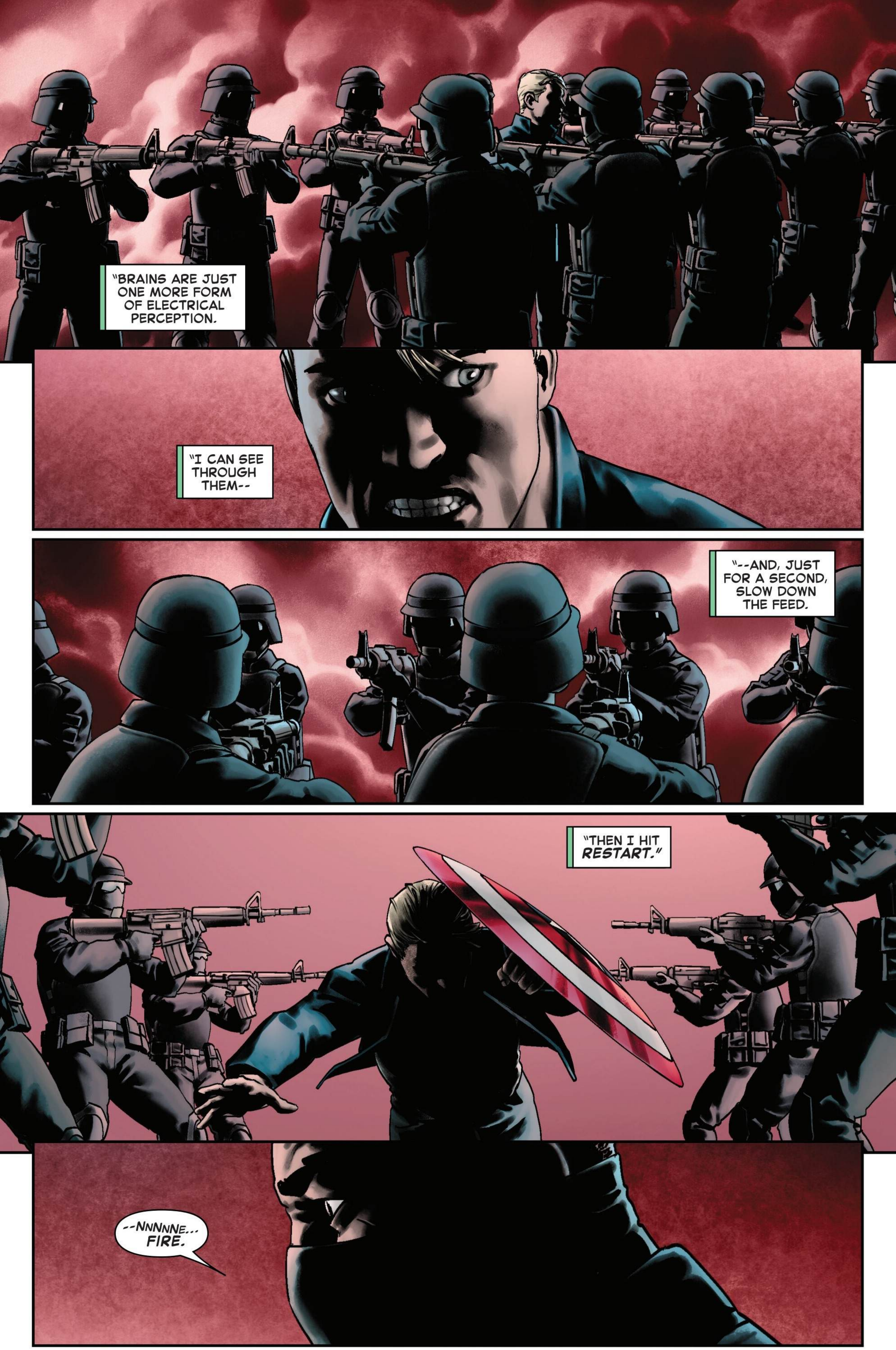

DRIVE 'EM OUT! WE DON'T WANT WITNESSES!
COME ON...WE NEED TO GET YOU OUT OF HARM'S WAY.
BUT WHAT ABOUT--?
DON'T WORRY--
"--HE CAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF."
SHUNK
YOU SHOULD LEAVE NOW.
ALL OF YOU.
WHILE YOU STILL CAN.

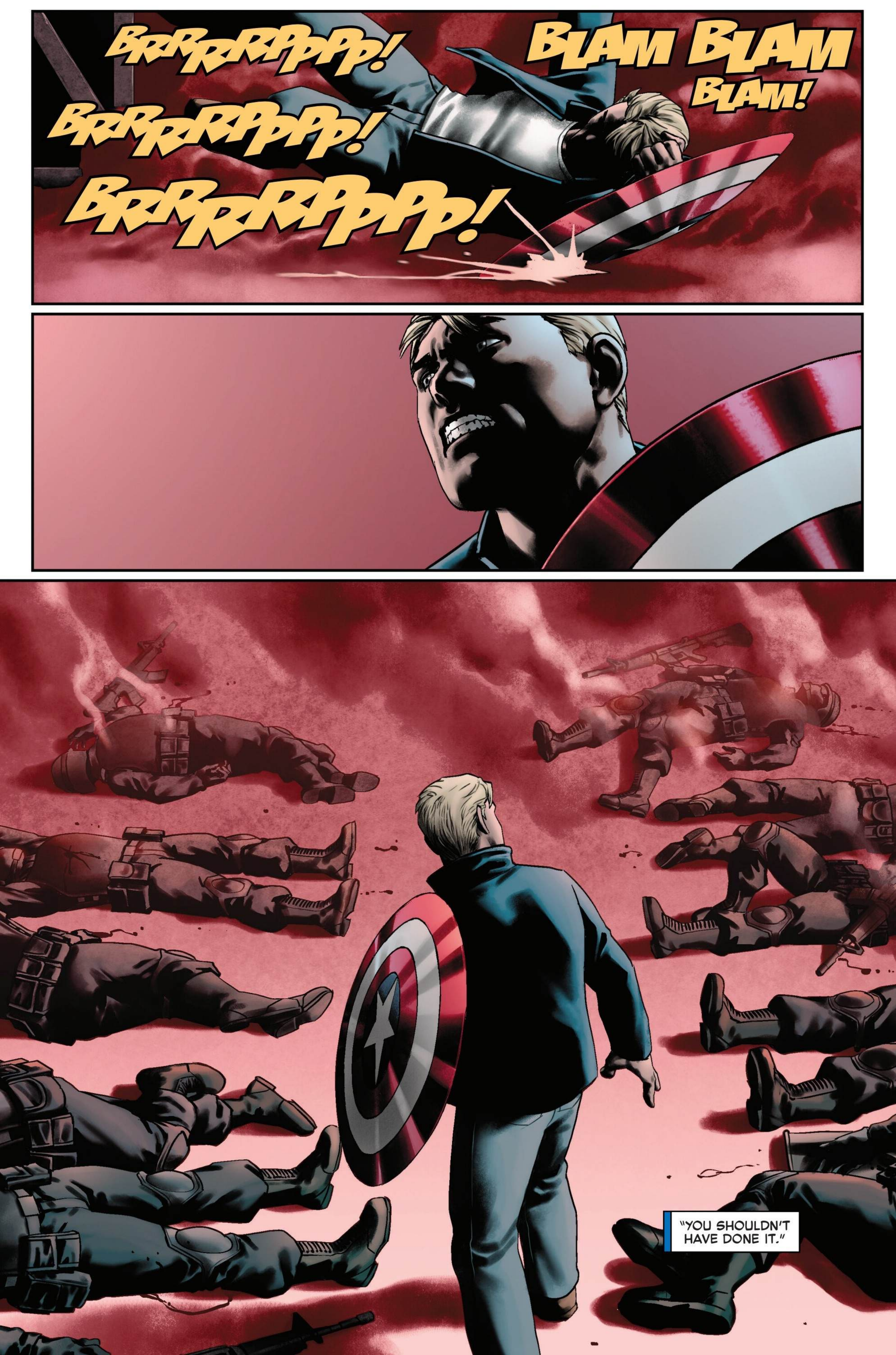

CUT HIM DOWN!
AAAAAGH!
MY KNEE! SONOFA--
BULLETS WORK BEST AT A DISTANCE.
LET'S SEE HOW BRAVE YOU ARE UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL.

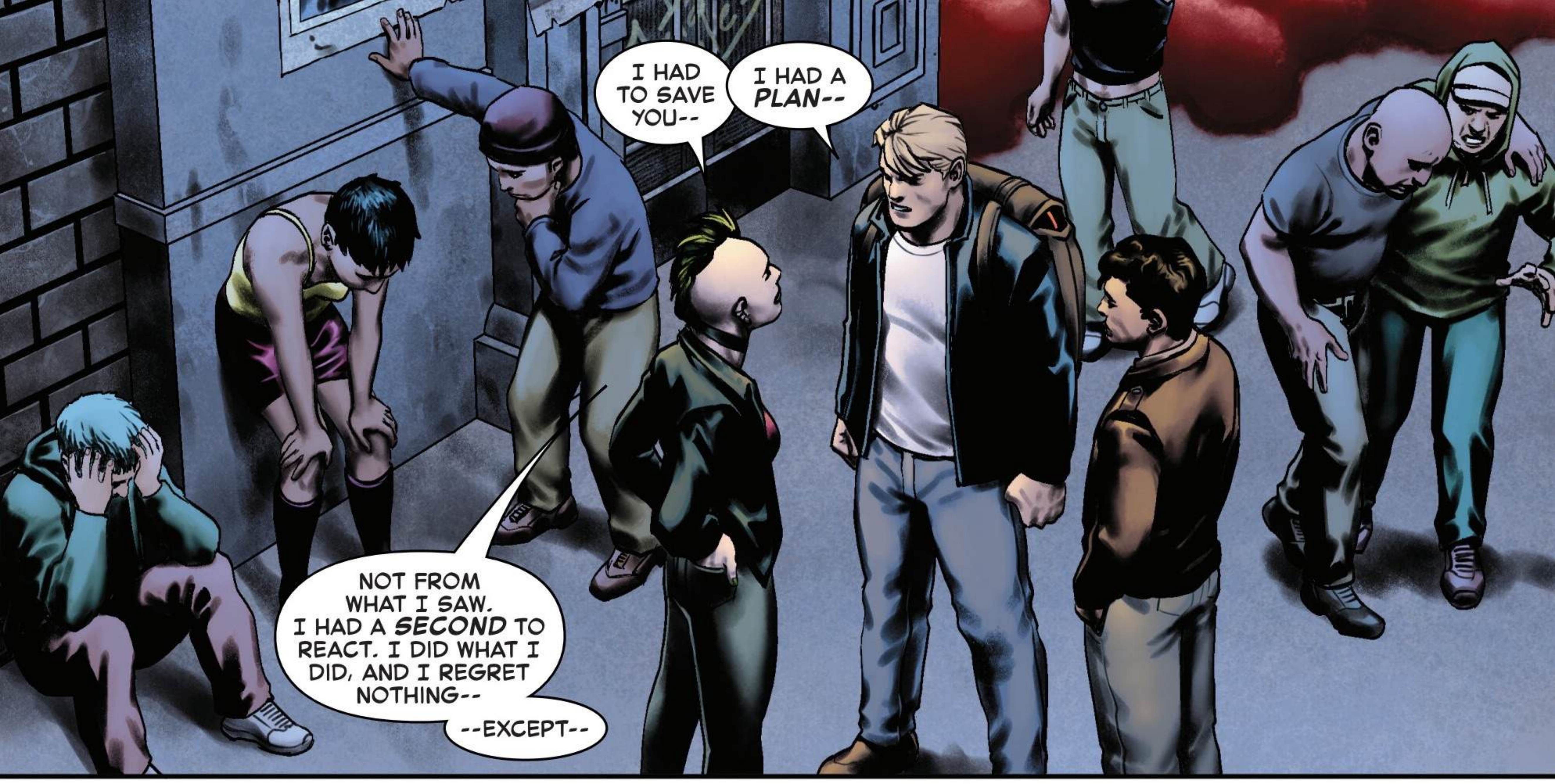

ANY LAST WORDS BEFORE YOU WAKE UP IN A HOSPITAL?
YEAH... FIVE OF 'EM.
TEAMS B AND C, GO!

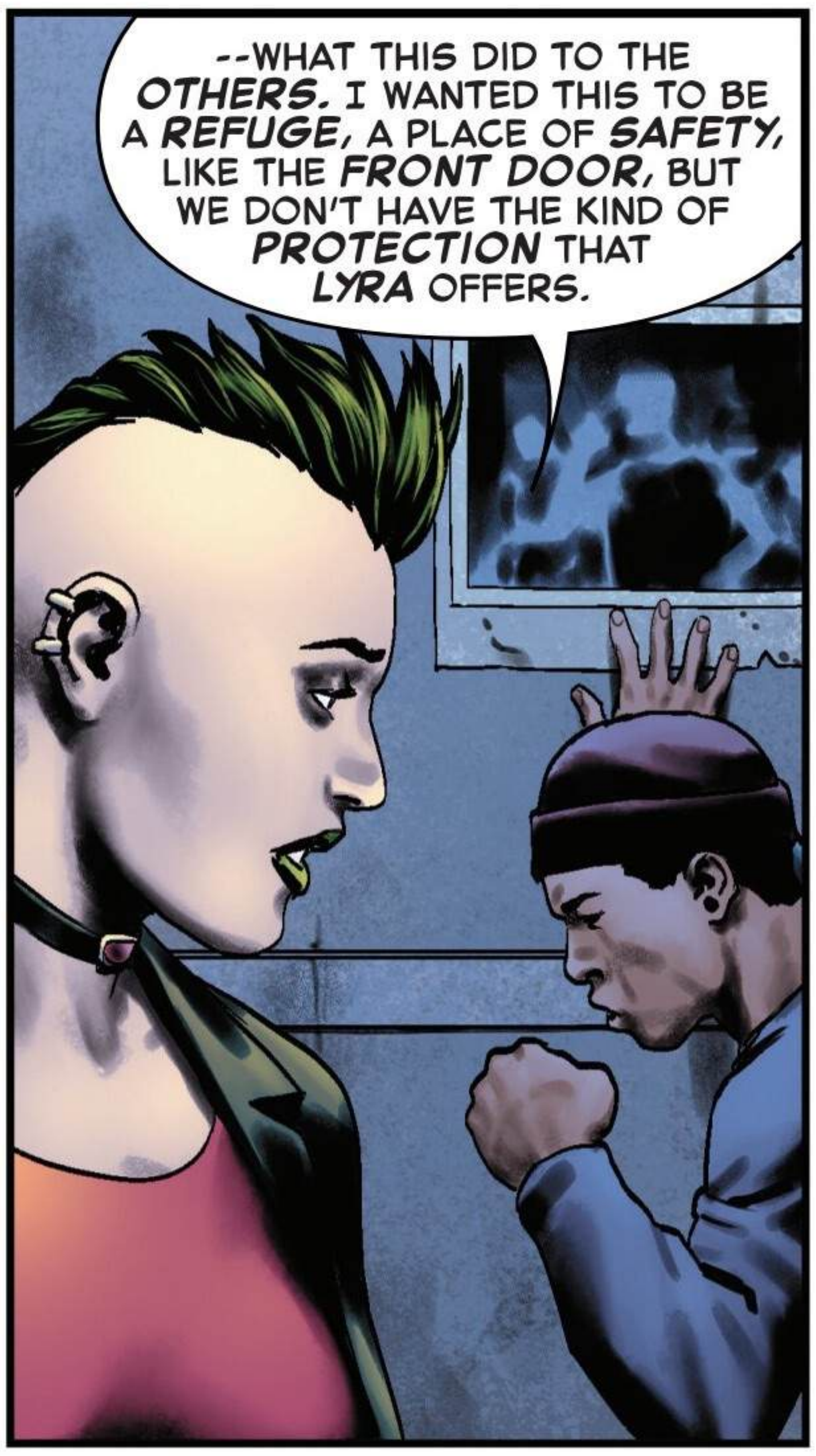

KRASH
GOT YOU IN A BIT OF A CROSSFIRE, CAP. WHICHEVER WAY YOU GO, THE OTHER SIDE WILL TAKE YOU DOWN.
GENTLEMEN--
--WE ARE ABOUT TO MAKE HISTORY.
NO--

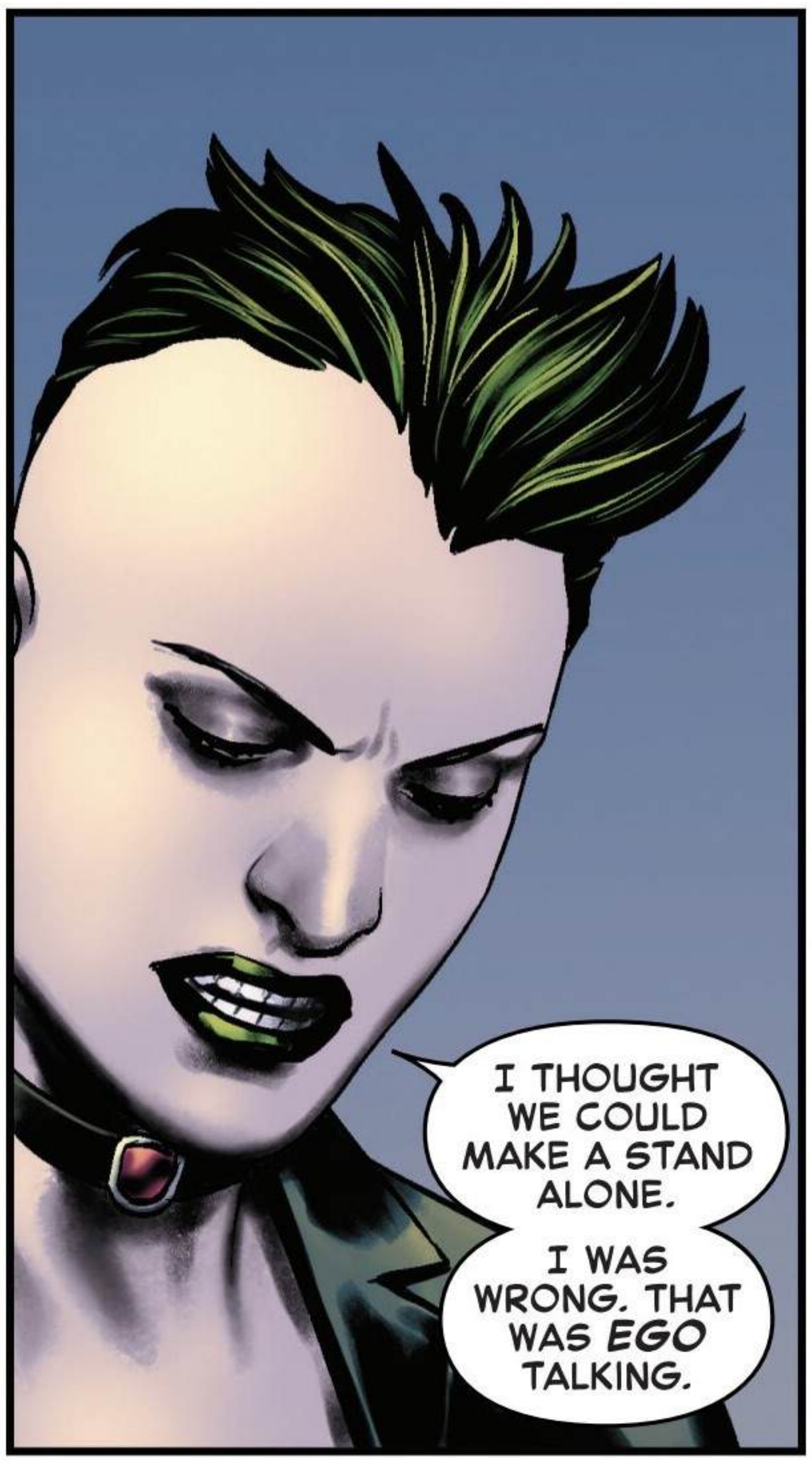

WHY ARE YOU STOP--
USE THE OTHER DOOR
ANOTHER DOOR
NO TIME... NEED TO CONCENTRATE...
I CAN ONLY DO THIS FOR A *SECOND*...
"...BUT THAT MAY BE ENOUGH."
OPEN FIRE IN THREE, TWO--
--ONNNNNNNNNN--

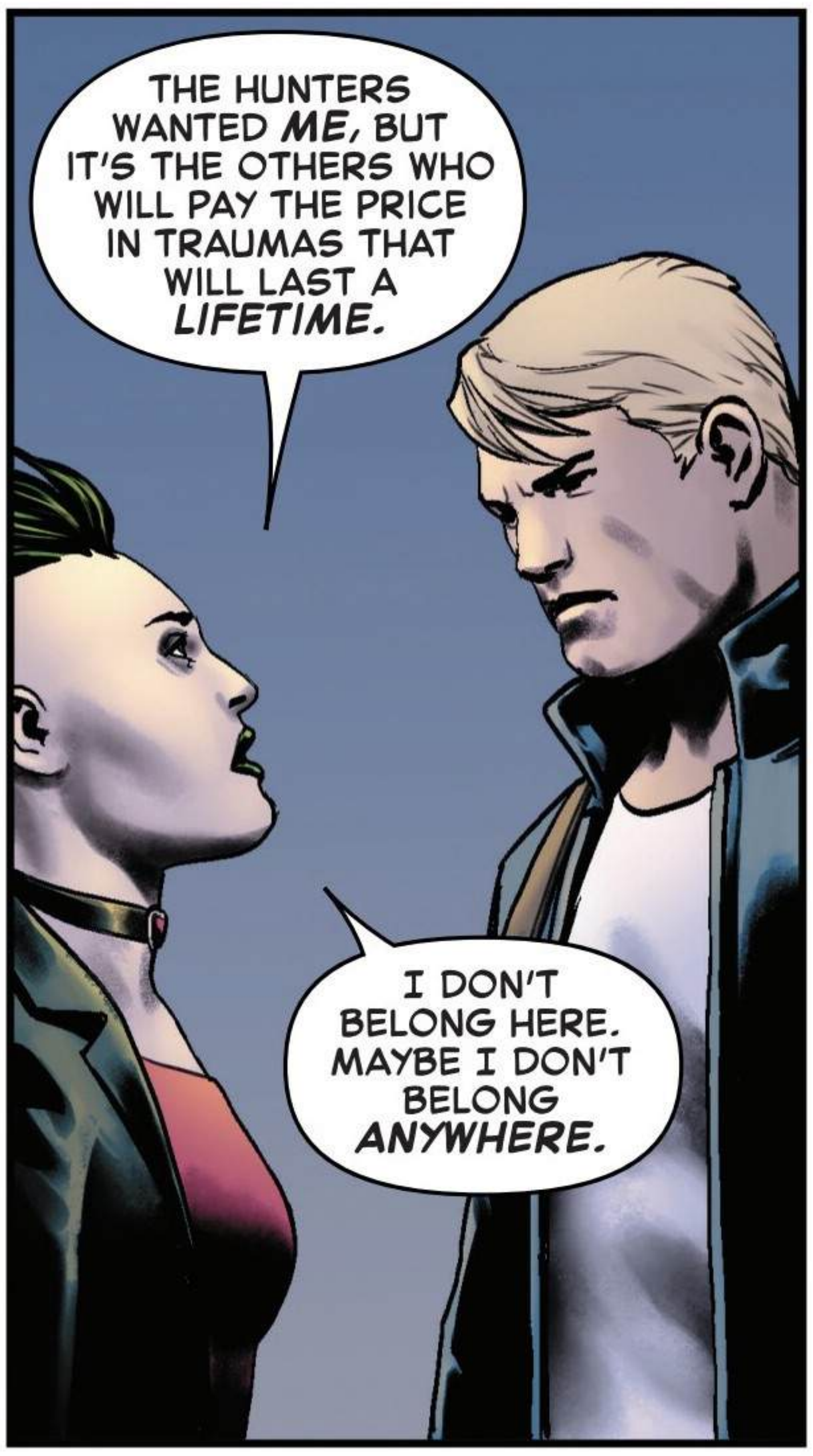

"BRAINS ARE JUST ONE MORE FORM OF ELECTRICAL PERCEPTION.
"I CAN SEE THROUGH THEM--
"--AND, JUST FOR A SECOND, SLOW DOWN THE FEED.
"THEN I HIT *RESTART.*"
--NNNNNE... *FIRE.*

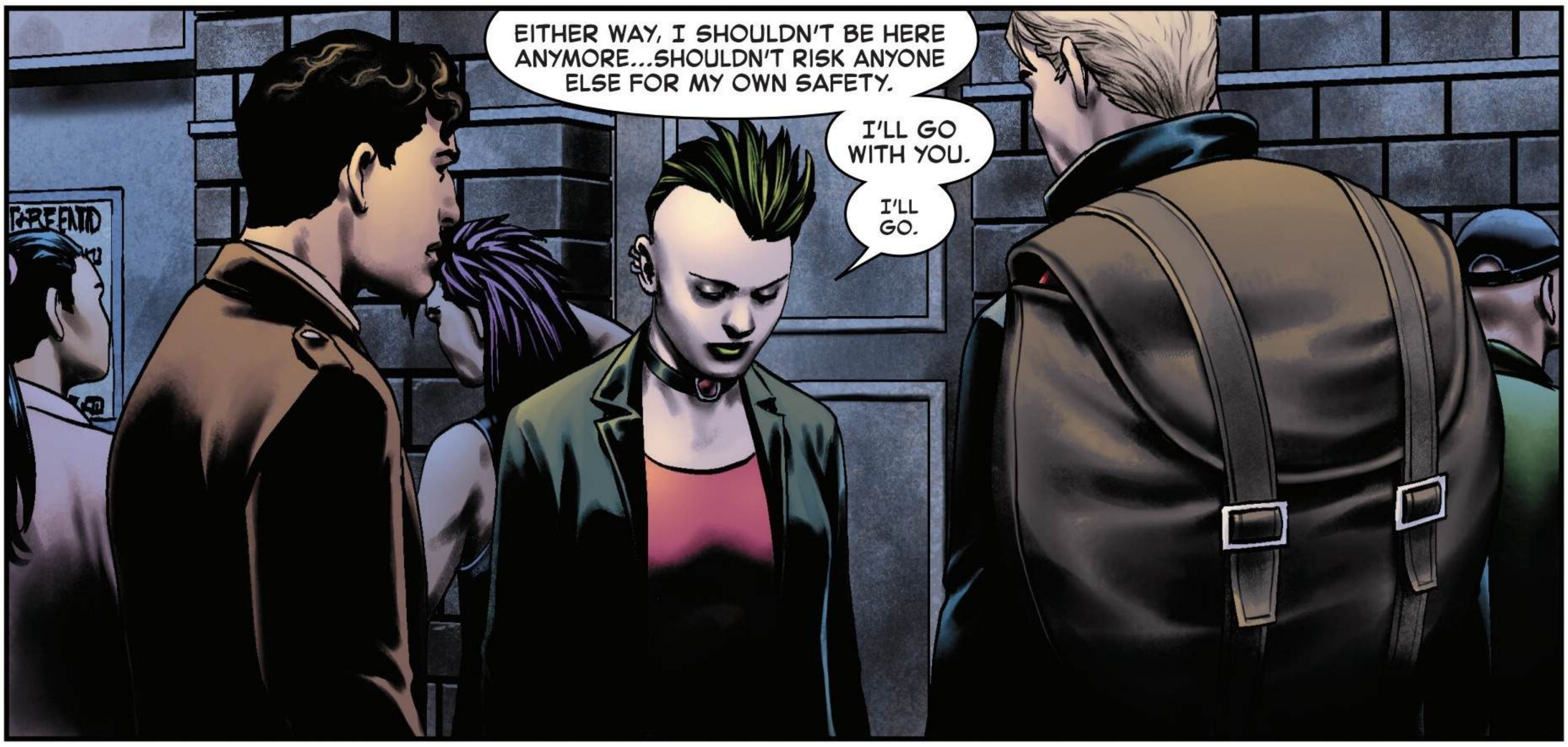

BRRRRRPPPP!
BRRRRRPPPP!
BRRRRRPPPP!
BLAM BLAM
BLAM!
"YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE IT."

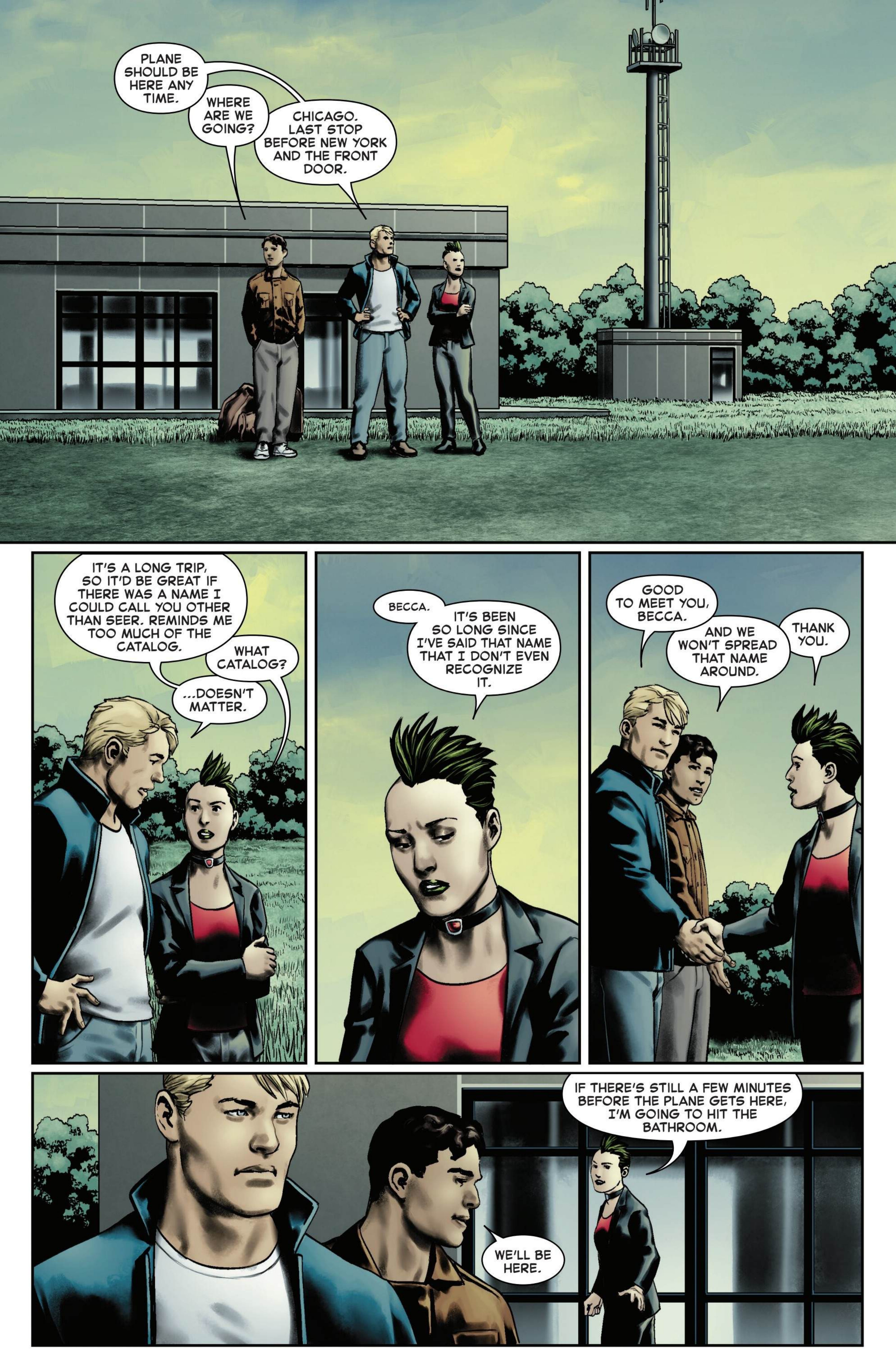

I HAD TO SAVE YOU--
I HAD A *PLAN--*
NOT FROM WHAT I SAW. I HAD A *SECOND* TO REACT. I DID WHAT I DID, AND I REGRET NOTHING--
--EXCEPT--

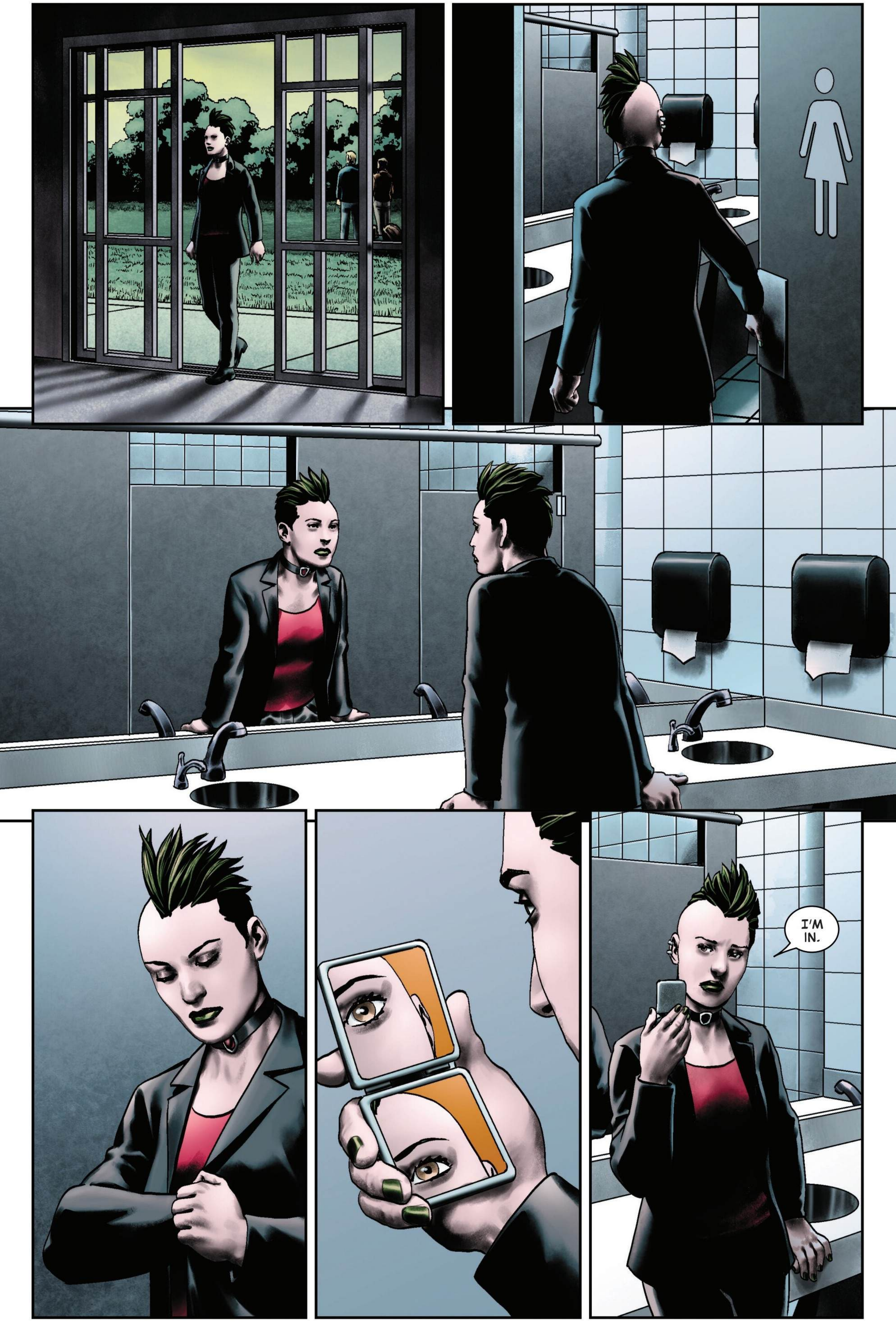

--WHAT THIS DID TO THE *OTHERS.* I WANTED THIS TO BE A *REFUGE,* A PLACE OF *SAFETY,* LIKE THE *FRONT DOOR,* BUT WE DON'T HAVE THE KIND OF *PROTECTION* THAT *LYRA* OFFERS.

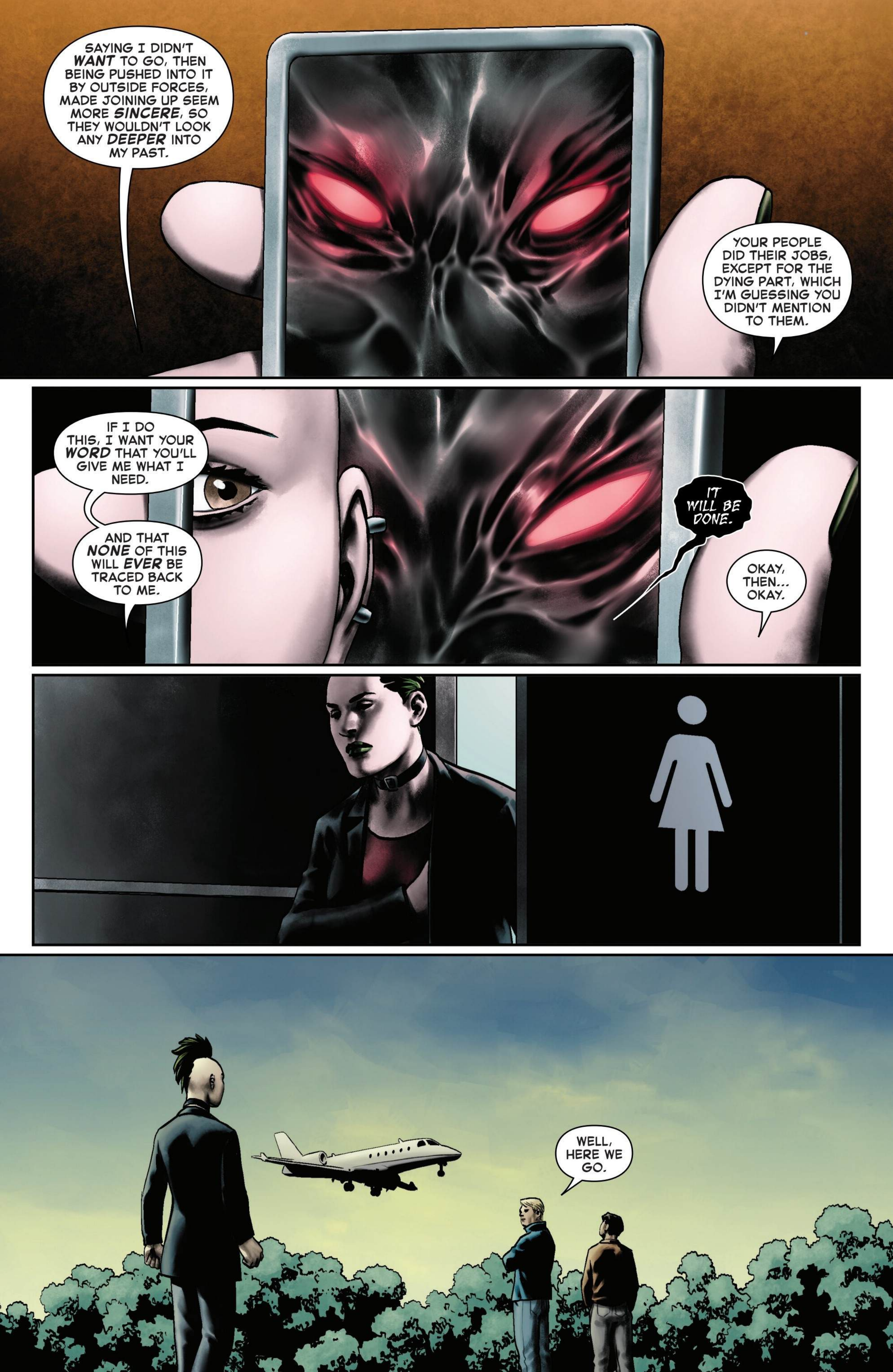

I THOUGHT WE COULD MAKE A STAND ALONE.
I WAS WRONG. THAT WAS *EGO* TALKING.

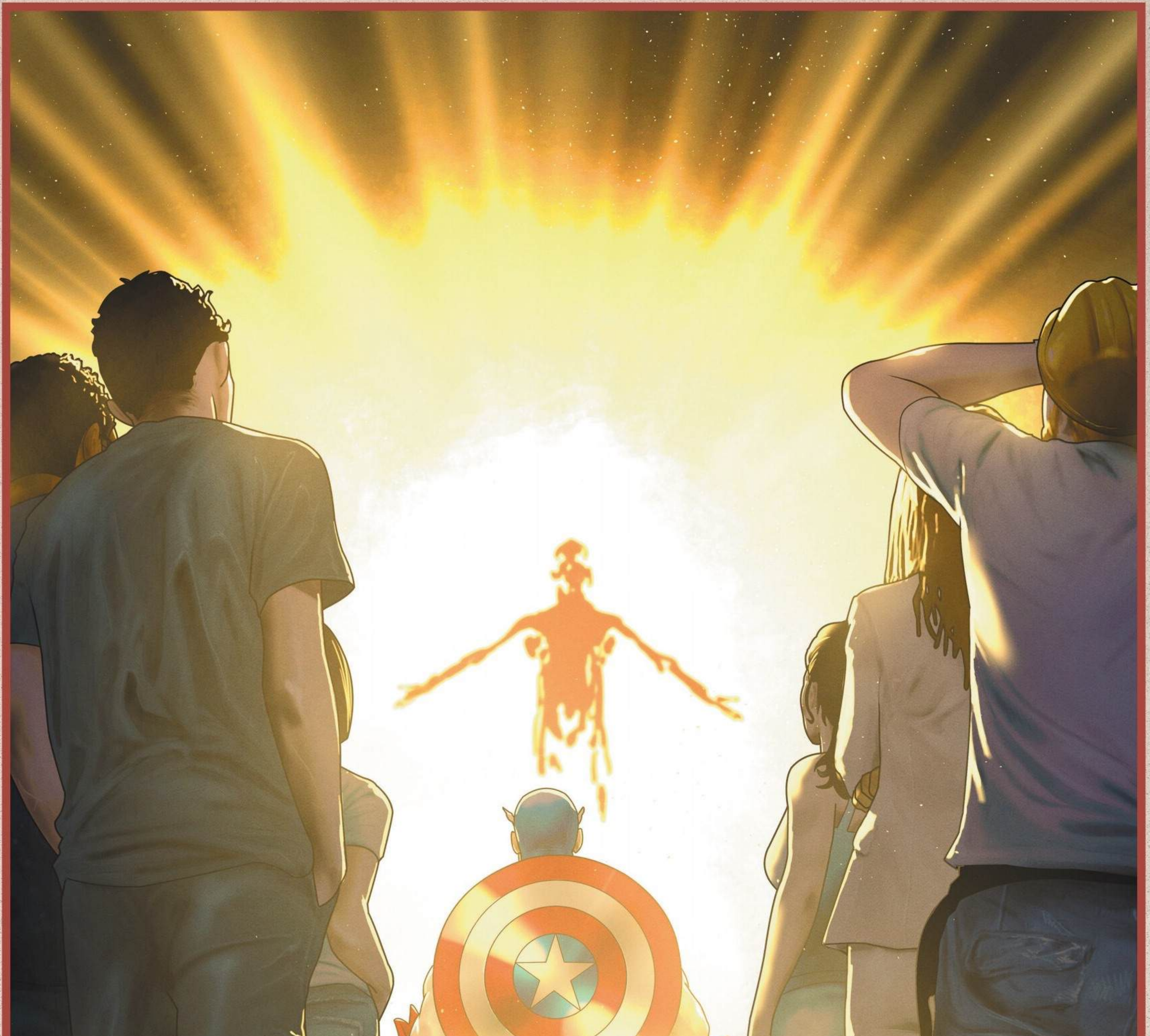

THE HUNTERS WANTED *ME,* BUT IT'S THE OTHERS WHO WILL PAY THE PRICE IN TRAUMAS THAT WILL LAST A *LIFETIME.*
I DON'T BELONG HERE. MAYBE I DON'T BELONG *ANYWHERE.*


EITHER WAY, I SHOULDN'T BE HERE ANYMORE...SHOULDN'T RISK ANYONE ELSE FOR MY OWN SAFETY.
I'LL GO WITH YOU.
I'LL GO.


PLANE SHOULD BE HERE ANY TIME.
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
CHICAGO. LAST STOP BEFORE NEW YORK AND THE FRONT DOOR.
IT'S A LONG TRIP, SO IT'D BE GREAT IF THERE WAS A NAME I COULD CALL YOU OTHER THAN SEER. REMINDS ME TOO MUCH OF THE CATALOG.
WHAT CATALOG?
...DOESN'T MATTER.
BECCA.
IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE SAID THAT NAME THAT I DON'T EVEN RECOGNIZE IT.
GOOD TO MEET YOU, BECCA.
AND WE WON'T SPREAD THAT NAME AROUND.
THANK YOU.
IF THERE'S STILL A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE PLANE GETS HERE, I'M GOING TO HIT THE BATHROOM.
WE'LL BE HERE.

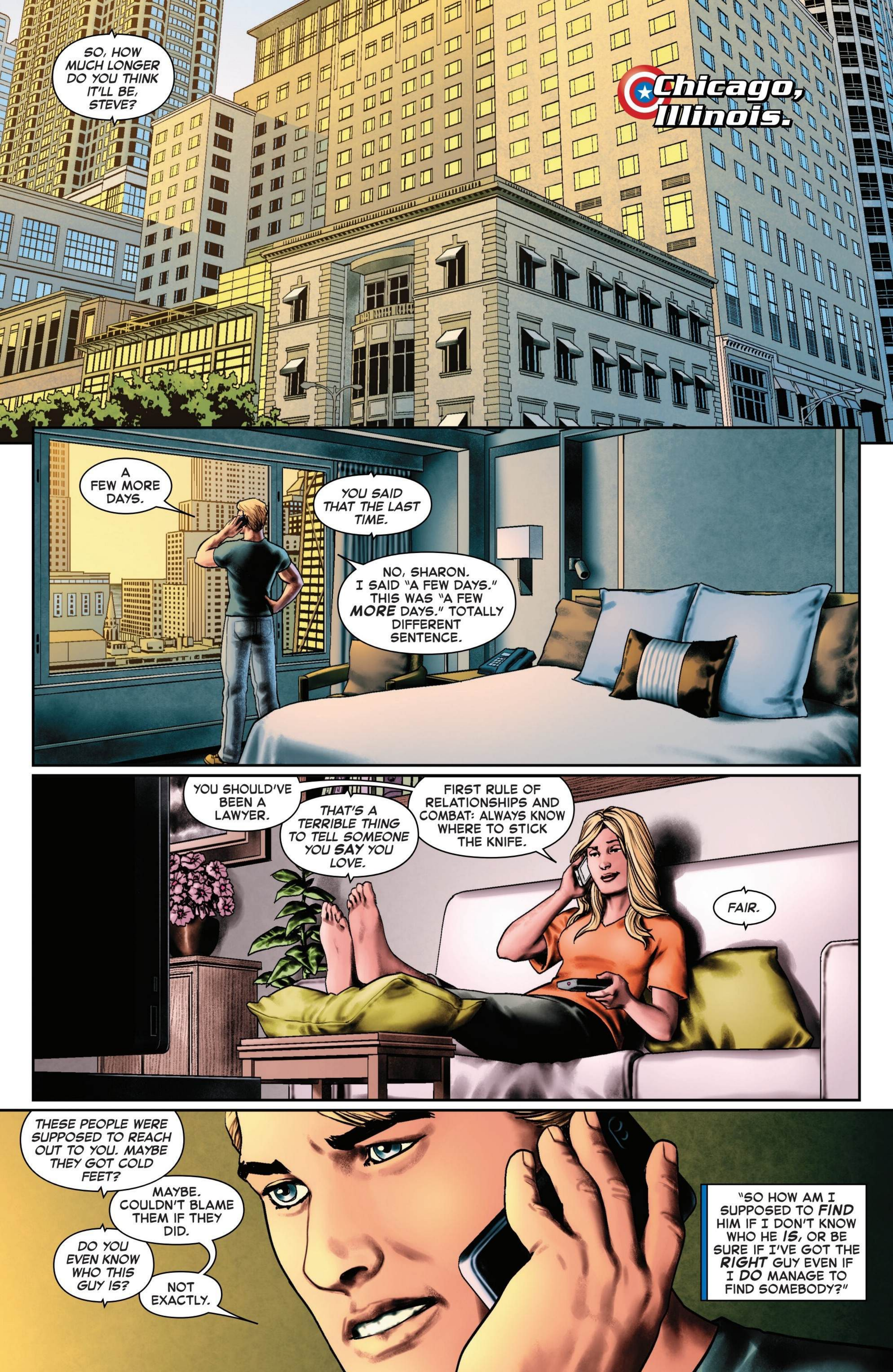

I'M IN.

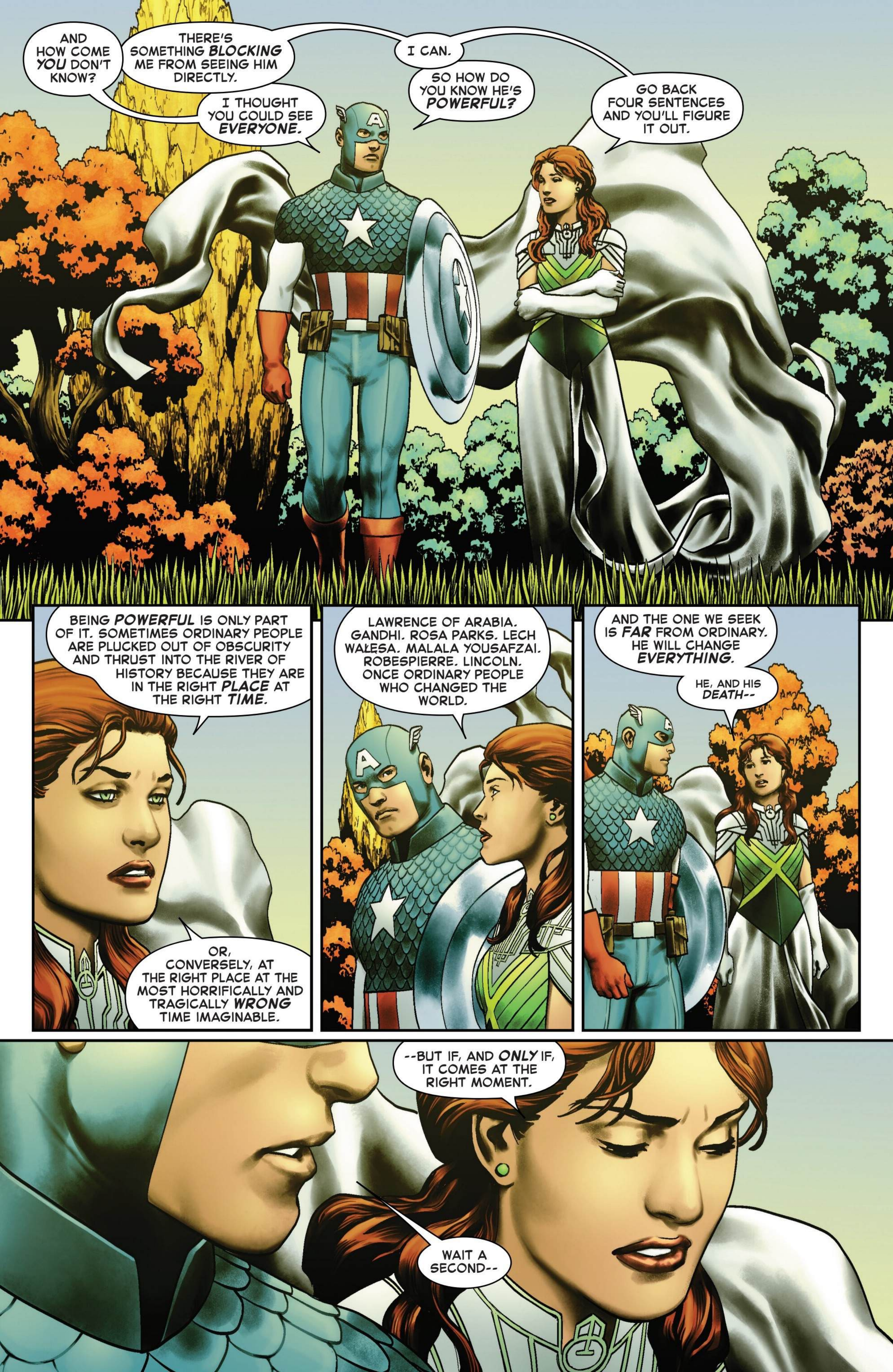

SAYING I DIDN'T *WANT* TO GO, THEN BEING PUSHED INTO IT BY OUTSIDE FORCES, MADE JOINING UP SEEM MORE *SINCERE*, SO THEY WOULDN'T LOOK ANY *DEEPER* INTO MY PAST.
YOUR PEOPLE DID THEIR JOBS, EXCEPT FOR THE DYING PART, WHICH I'M GUESSING YOU DIDN'T MENTION TO THEM.
IF I DO THIS, I WANT YOUR *WORD* THAT YOU'LL GIVE ME WHAT I NEED.
AND THAT *NONE* OF THIS WILL *EVER* BE TRACED BACK TO ME.
IT WILL BE DONE.
OKAY, THEN... OKAY.
WELL, HERE WE GO.

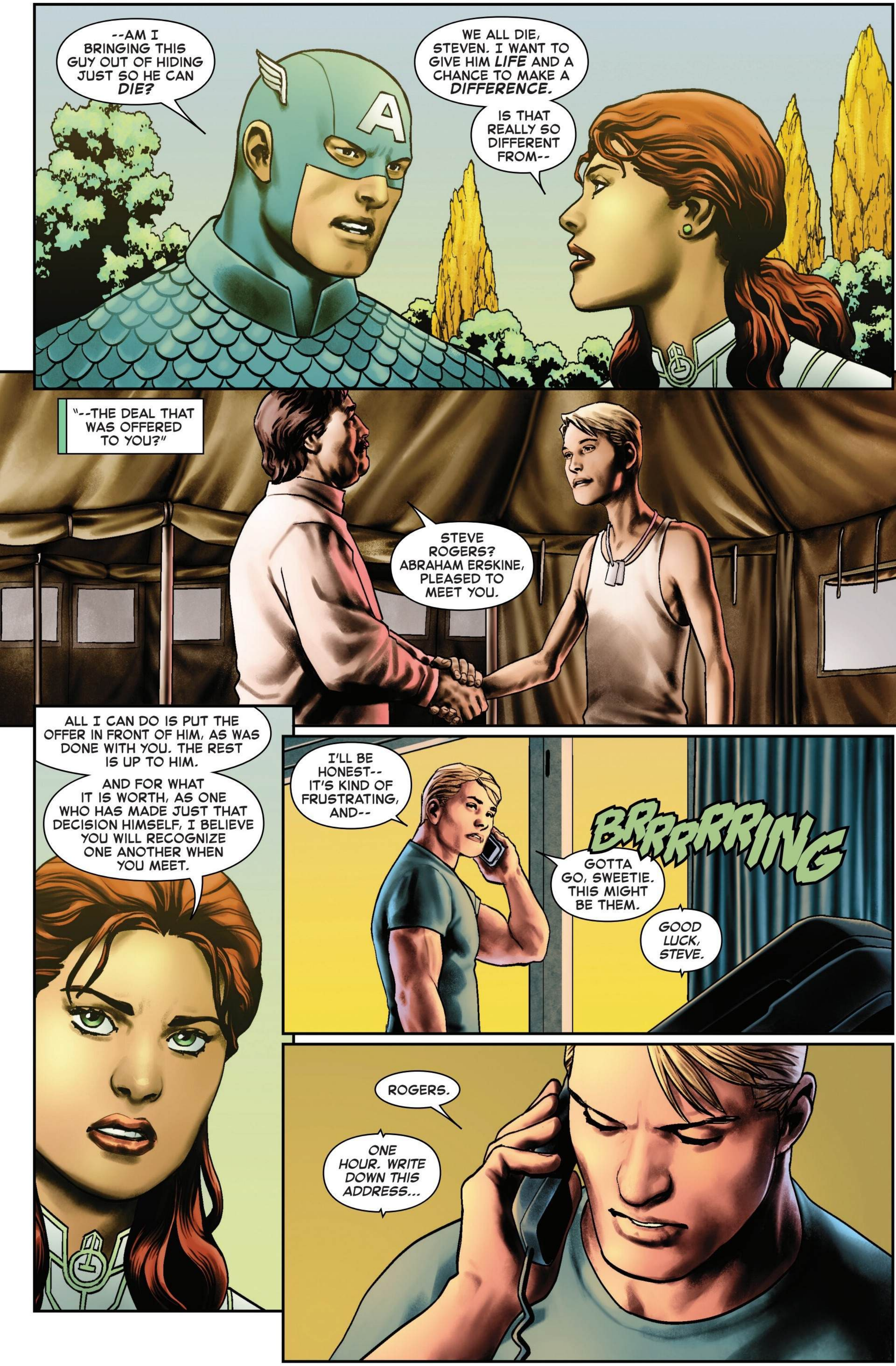


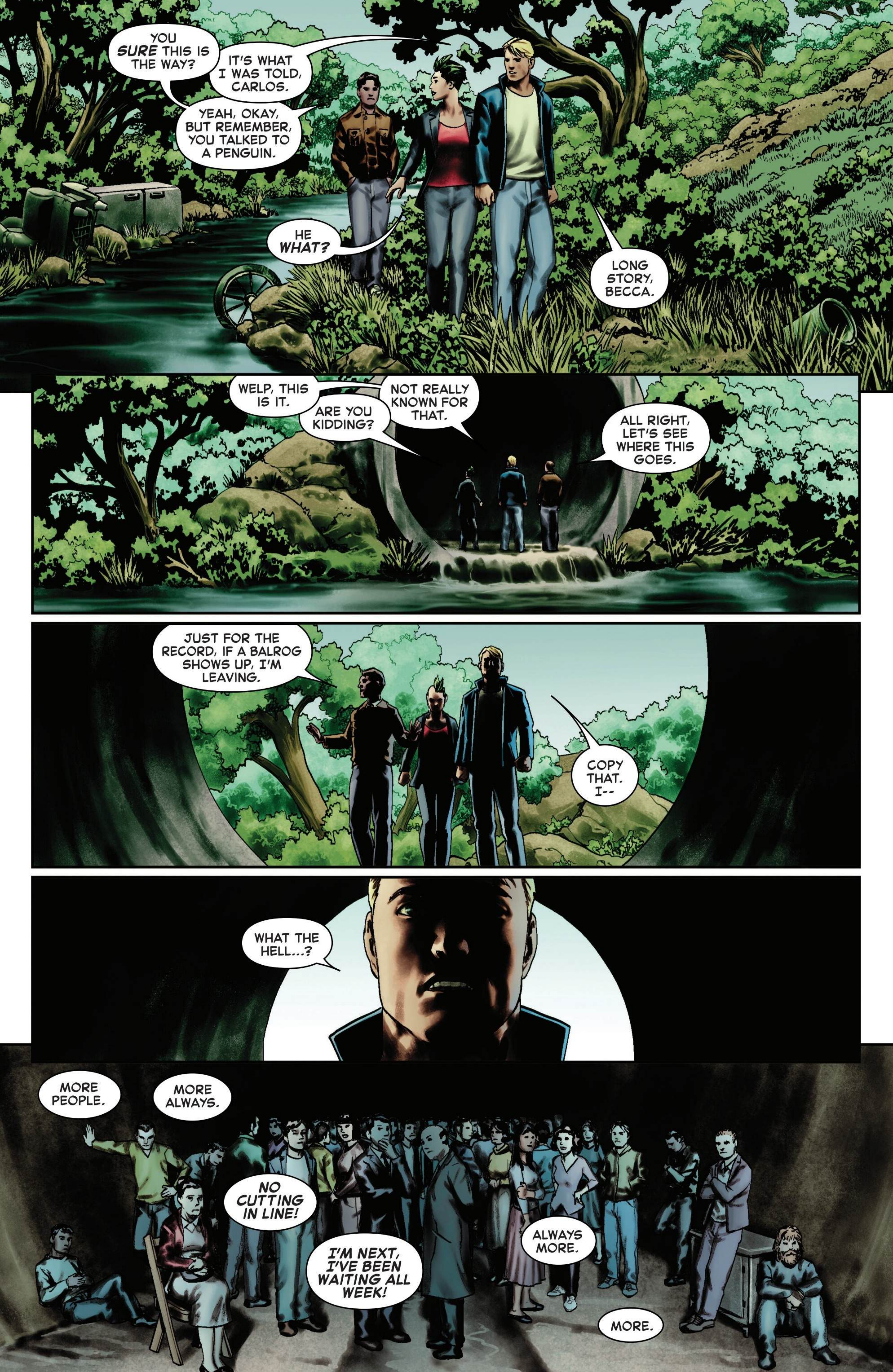
CAPTAIN AMERICA

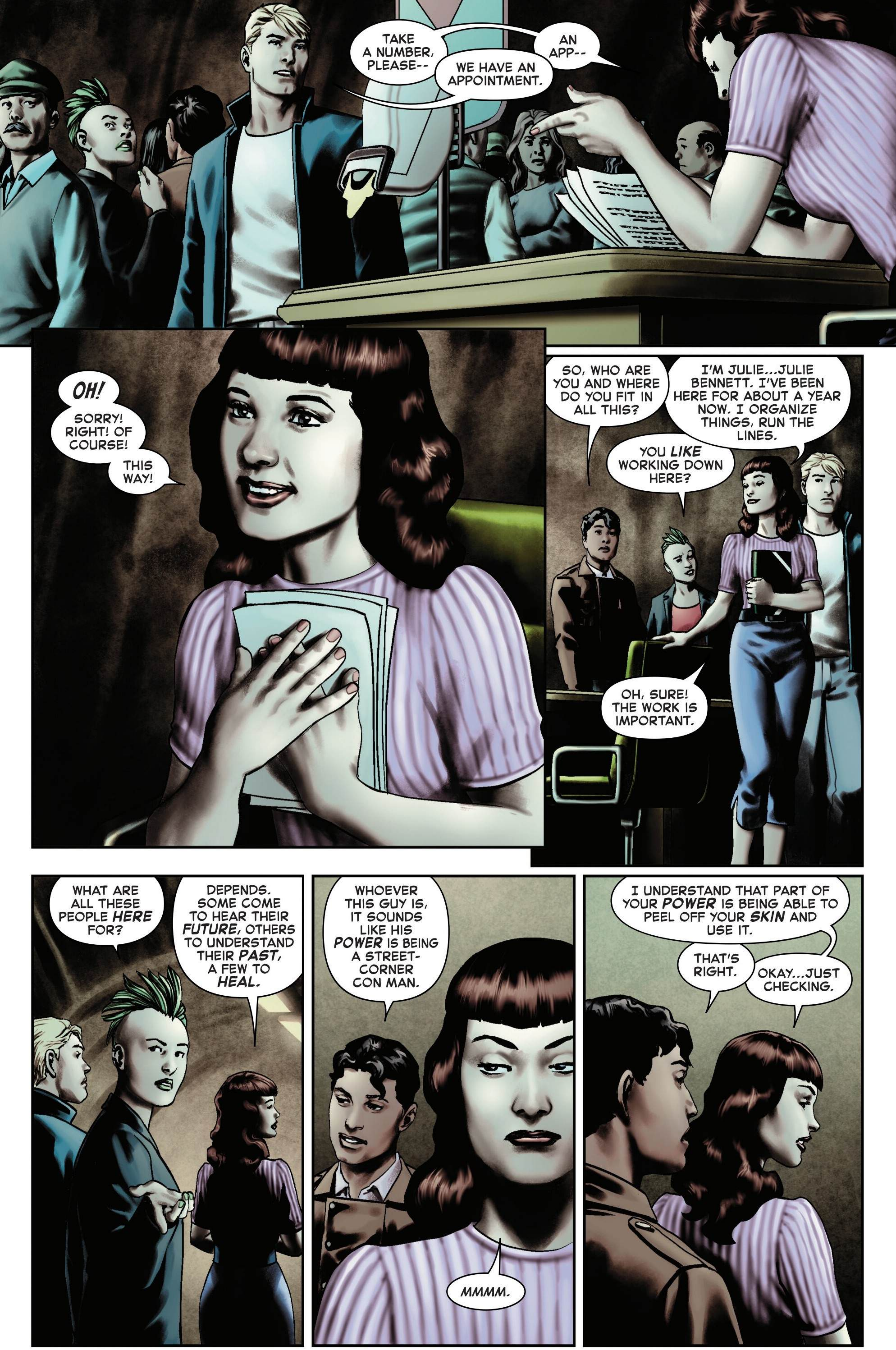
TRYING TO COME HOME | №11

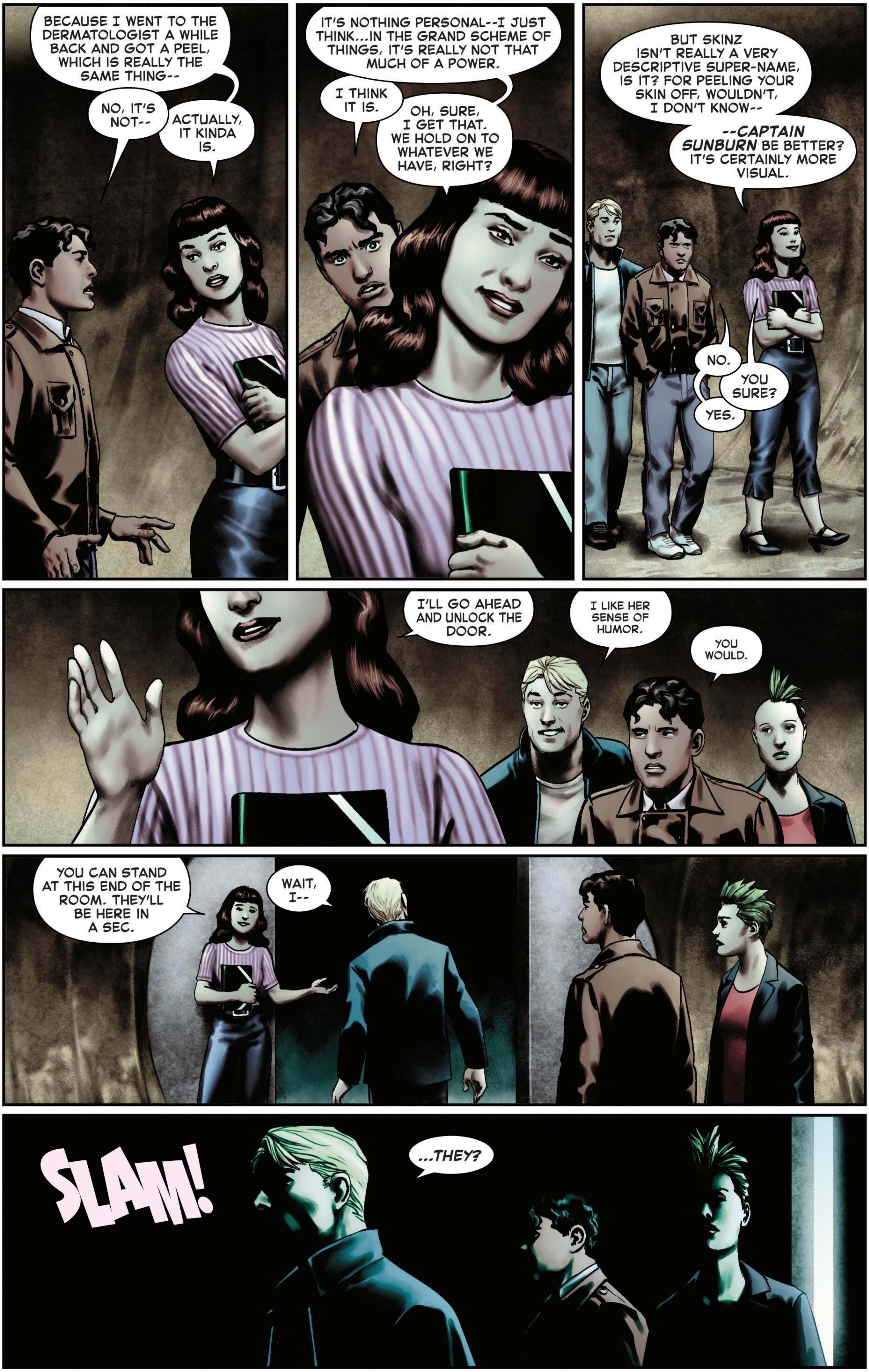

SO, HOW MUCH LONGER DO YOU THINK IT'LL BE, STEVE?
Chicago, Illinois.
A FEW MORE DAYS.
YOU SAID THAT THE LAST TIME.
NO, SHARON. I SAID "A FEW DAYS." THIS WAS "A FEW *MORE* DAYS." TOTALLY DIFFERENT SENTENCE.
YOU SHOULD'VE BEEN A LAWYER.
THAT'S A TERRIBLE THING TO TELL SOMEONE YOU *SAY* YOU LOVE.
FIRST RULE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND COMBAT: ALWAYS KNOW WHERE TO STICK THE KNIFE.
FAIR.
THESE PEOPLE WERE SUPPOSED TO REACH OUT TO YOU. MAYBE THEY GOT COLD FEET?
MAYBE. COULDN'T BLAME THEM IF THEY DID.
DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHO THIS GUY IS?
NOT EXACTLY.
"SO HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO *FIND* HIM IF I DON'T KNOW WHO HE *IS*, OR BE SURE IF I'VE GOT THE *RIGHT* GUY EVEN IF I *DO* MANAGE TO FIND SOMEBODY?"

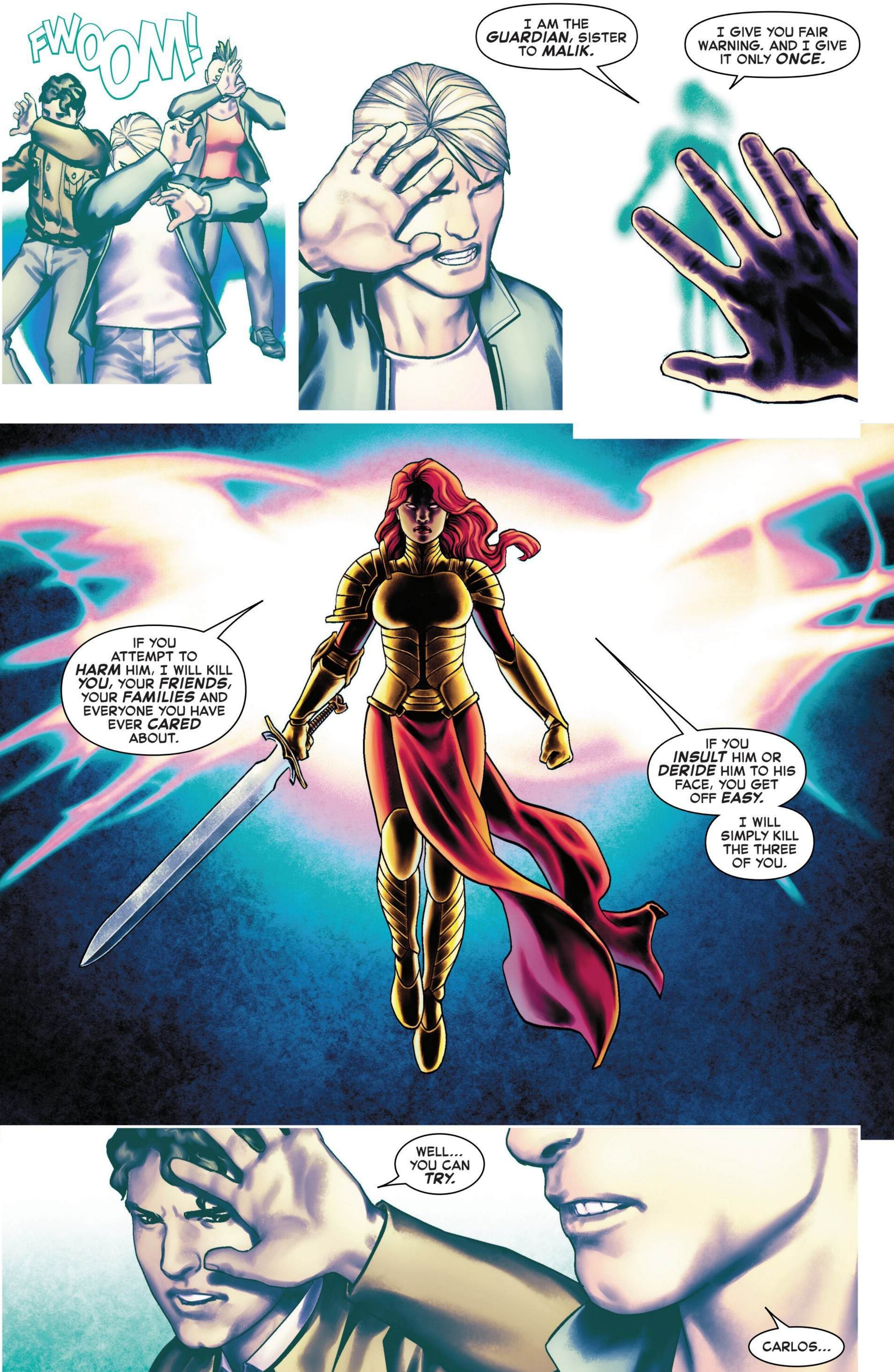

AND HOW COME YOU DON'T KNOW?
I THOUGHT YOU COULD SEE EVERYONE.
I CAN.
THERE'S SOMETHING BLOCKING ME FROM SEEING HIM DIRECTLY.
SO HOW DO YOU KNOW HE'S POWERFUL?
GO BACK FOUR SENTENCES AND YOU'LL FIGURE IT OUT.
BEING POWERFUL IS ONLY PART OF IT. SOMETIMES ORDINARY PEOPLE ARE PLUCKED OUT OF OBSCURITY AND THRUST INTO THE RIVER OF HISTORY BECAUSE THEY ARE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.
OR, CONVERSELY, AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE MOST HORRIFICALLY AND TRAGICALLY WRONG TIME IMAGINABLE.
LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. GANDHI. ROSA PARKS. LECH WAŁĘSA. MALALA YOUSAFZAI. ROBESPIERRE. LINCOLN. ONCE ORDINARY PEOPLE WHO CHANGED THE WORLD.
AND THE ONE WE SEEK IS FAR FROM ORDINARY. HE WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING.
HE, AND HIS DEATH--
--BUT IF, AND ONLY IF, IT COMES AT THE RIGHT MOMENT.
WAIT A SECOND--

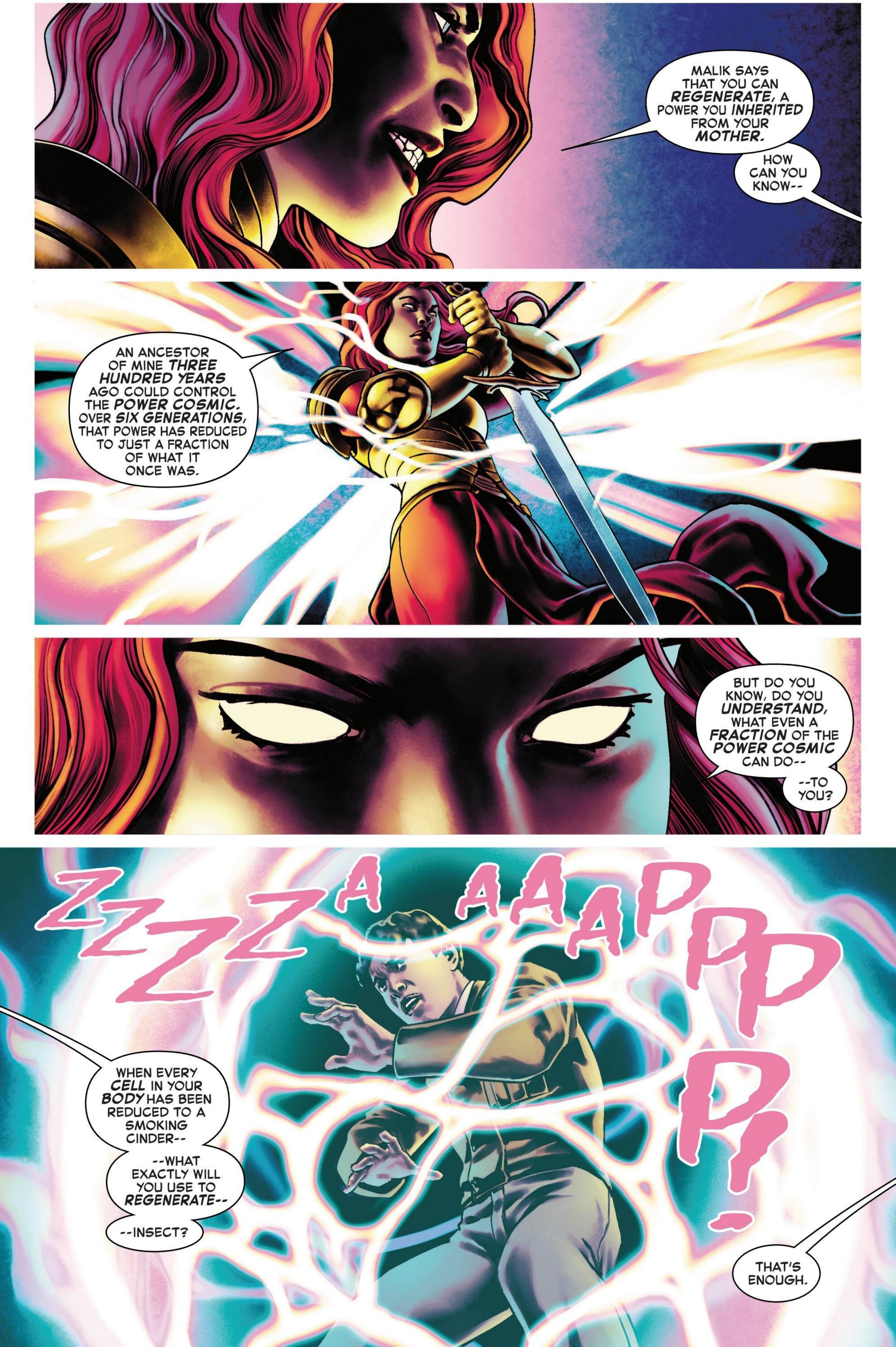

--AM I BRINGING THIS GUY OUT OF HIDING JUST SO HE CAN *DIE?*
WE ALL DIE, STEVEN. I WANT TO GIVE HIM *LIFE* AND A CHANCE TO MAKE A *DIFFERENCE.*
IS THAT REALLY SO DIFFERENT FROM--
"--THE DEAL THAT WAS OFFERED TO YOU?"
STEVE ROGERS? ABRAHAM ERSKINE, PLEASED TO MEET YOU.
ALL I CAN DO IS PUT THE OFFER IN FRONT OF HIM, AS WAS DONE WITH YOU. THE REST IS UP TO HIM.
AND FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH, AS ONE WHO HAS MADE JUST THAT DECISION HIMSELF, I BELIEVE YOU WILL RECOGNIZE ONE ANOTHER WHEN YOU MEET.
I'LL BE HONEST-- IT'S KIND OF FRUSTRATING, AND--
BRRRRRING
GOTTA GO, SWEETIE. THIS MIGHT BE THEM.
GOOD LUCK, STEVE.
ROGERS.
ONE HOUR. WRITE DOWN THIS ADDRESS...

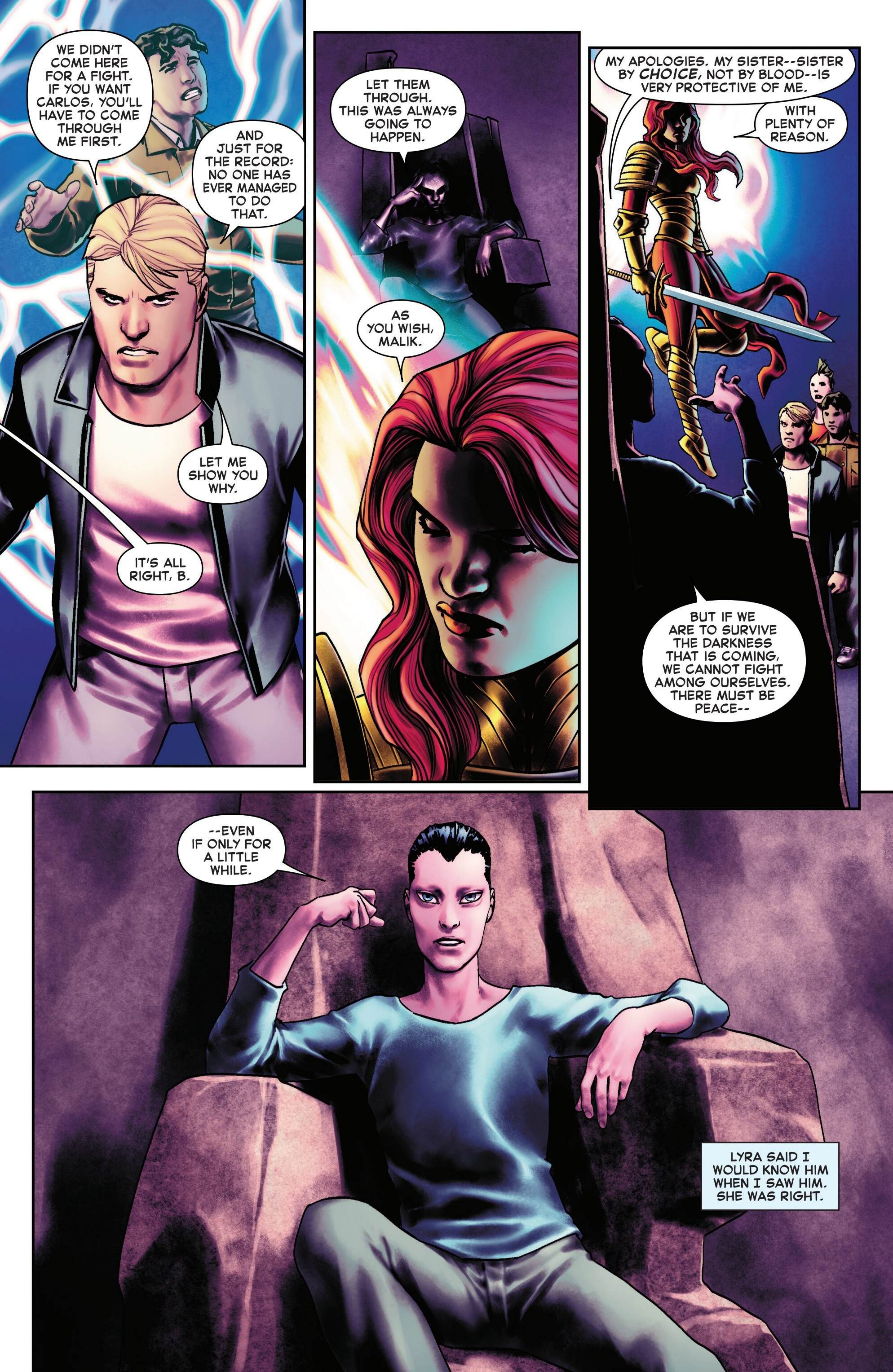

YOU *SURE* THIS IS THE WAY?
IT'S WHAT I WAS TOLD, CARLOS.
YEAH, OKAY, BUT REMEMBER, YOU TALKED TO A PENGUIN.
HE *WHAT?*
LONG STORY, BECCA.
WELP, THIS IS IT.
ARE YOU KIDDING?
NOT REALLY KNOWN FOR THAT.
ALL RIGHT, LET'S SEE WHERE THIS GOES.
JUST FOR THE RECORD, IF A BALROG SHOWS UP, I'M LEAVING.
COPY THAT. I--
WHAT THE HELL...?
MORE PEOPLE.
MORE ALWAYS.
NO CUTTING IN LINE!
I'M NEXT, I'VE BEEN WAITING ALL WEEK!
ALWAYS MORE.
MORE.

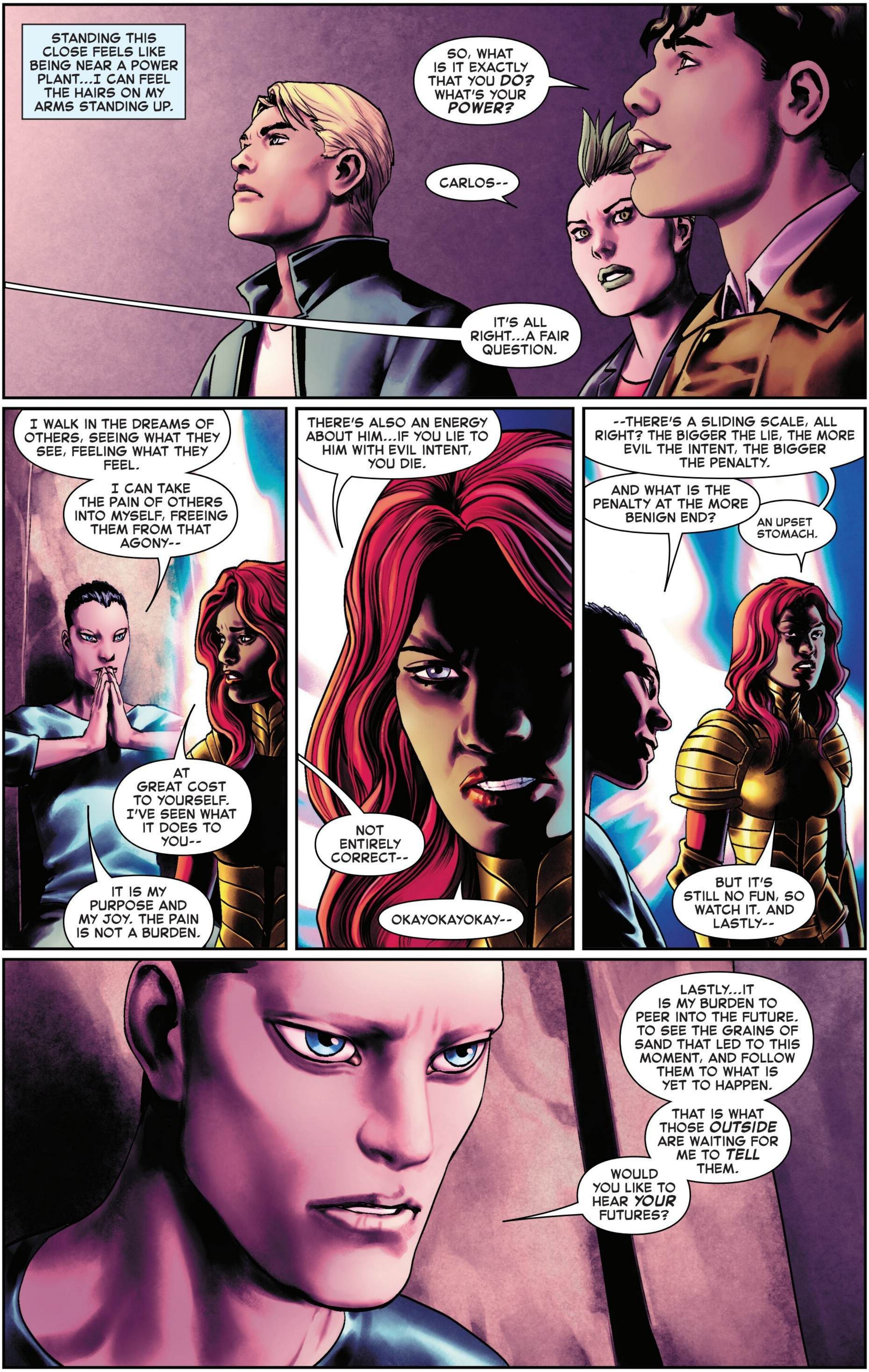

TAKE A NUMBER, PLEASE--
AN APP--
WE HAVE AN APPOINTMENT.
OH! SORRY! RIGHT! OF COURSE!
THIS WAY!
SO, WHO ARE YOU AND WHERE DO YOU FIT IN ALL THIS?
I'M JULIE...JULIE BENNETT. I'VE BEEN HERE FOR ABOUT A YEAR NOW. I ORGANIZE THINGS, RUN THE LINES.
YOU *LIKE* WORKING DOWN HERE?
OH, SURE! THE WORK IS IMPORTANT.
WHAT ARE ALL THESE PEOPLE *HERE* FOR?
DEPENDS. SOME COME TO HEAR THEIR *FUTURE,* OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR *PAST,* A FEW TO *HEAL.*
WHOEVER THIS GUY IS, IT SOUNDS LIKE HIS *POWER* IS BEING A STREET-CORNER CON MAN.
MMMM.
I UNDERSTAND THAT PART OF YOUR *POWER* IS BEING ABLE TO PEEL OFF YOUR *SKIN* AND USE IT.
THAT'S RIGHT.
OKAY...JUST CHECKING.

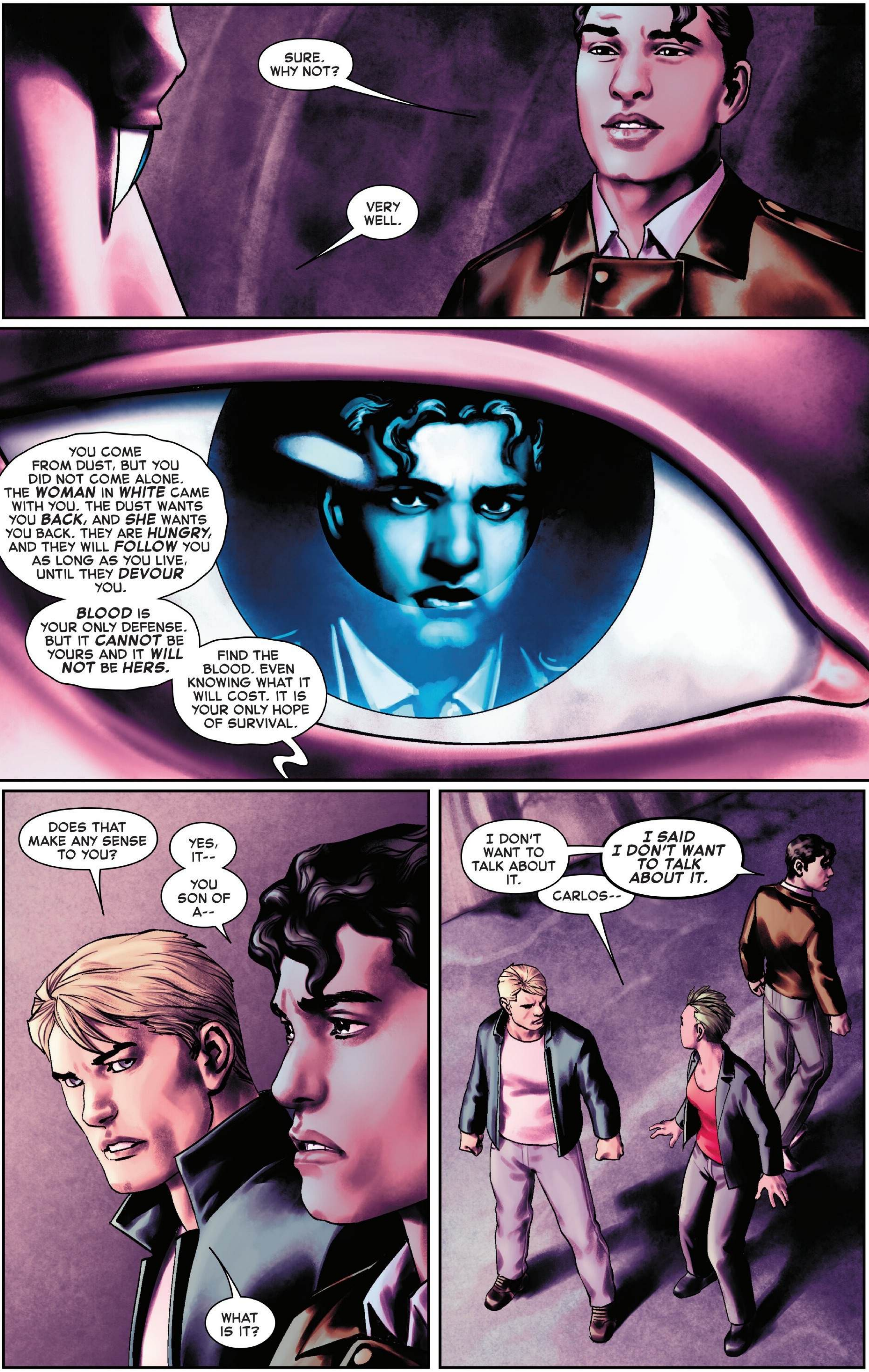

BECAUSE I WENT TO THE DERMATOLOGIST A WHILE BACK AND GOT A PEEL, WHICH IS REALLY THE SAME THING--
NO, IT'S NOT--
ACTUALLY, IT KINDA IS.
IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL--I JUST THINK...IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS, IT'S REALLY NOT THAT MUCH OF A POWER.
I THINK IT IS.
OH, SURE, I GET THAT. WE HOLD ON TO WHATEVER WE HAVE, RIGHT?
BUT SKINZ ISN'T REALLY A VERY DESCRIPTIVE SUPER-NAME, IS IT? FOR PEELING YOUR SKIN OFF, WOULDN'T, I DON'T KNOW--
--*CAPTAIN SUNBURN* BE BETTER? IT'S CERTAINLY MORE VISUAL.
NO.
YOU SURE?
YES.
I'LL GO AHEAD AND UNLOCK THE DOOR.
I LIKE HER SENSE OF HUMOR.
YOU WOULD.
YOU CAN STAND AT THIS END OF THE ROOM. THEY'LL BE HERE IN A SEC.
WAIT, I--
SLAM!
...THEY?

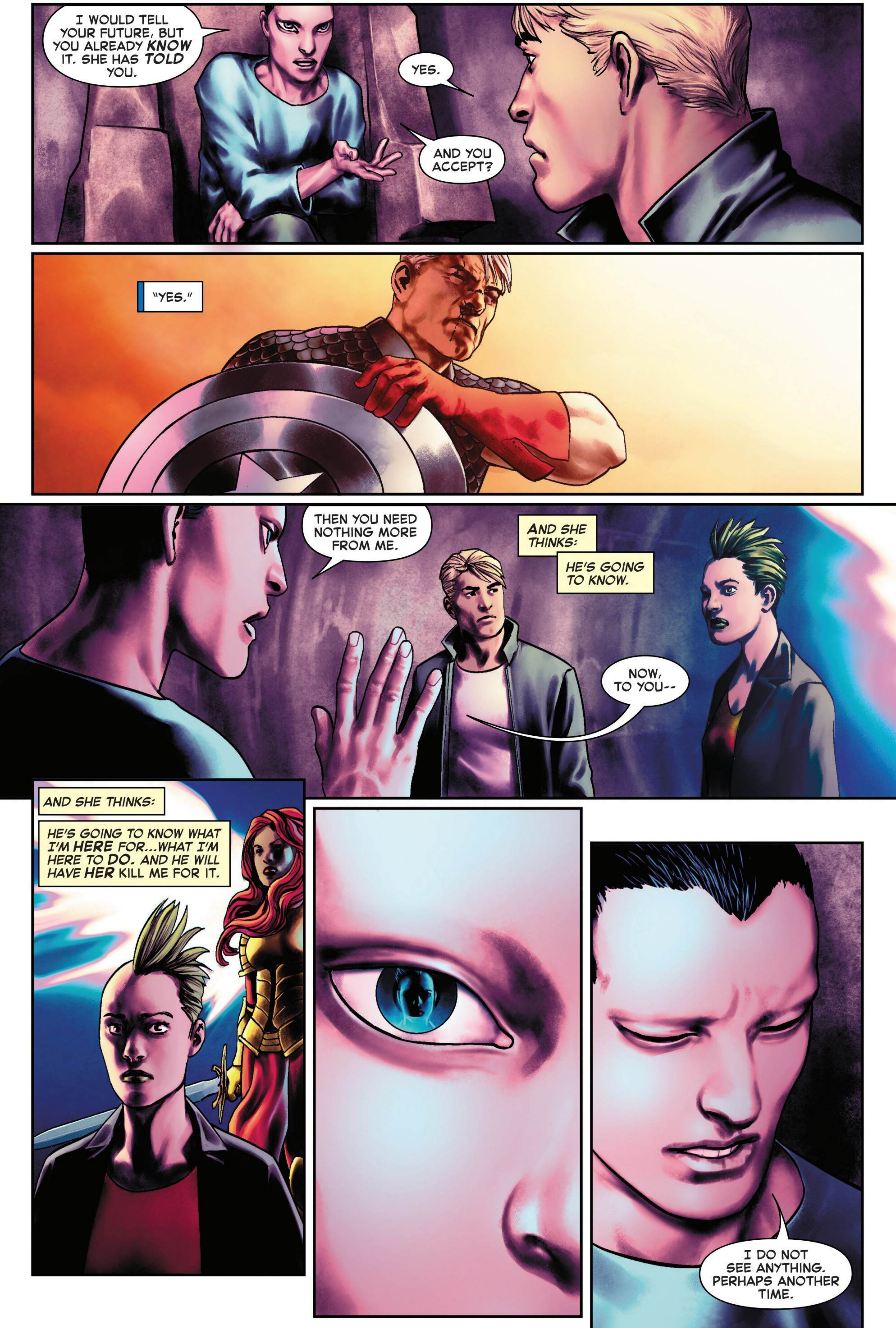

FWOOM!
I AM THE GUARDIAN, SISTER TO MALIK.
I GIVE YOU FAIR WARNING. AND I GIVE IT ONLY ONCE.
IF YOU ATTEMPT TO HARM HIM, I WILL KILL YOU, YOUR FRIENDS, YOUR FAMILIES AND EVERYONE YOU HAVE EVER CARED ABOUT.
IF YOU INSULT HIM OR DERIDE HIM TO HIS FACE, YOU GET OFF EASY.
I WILL SIMPLY KILL THE THREE OF YOU.
WELL... YOU CAN TRY.
CARLOS...

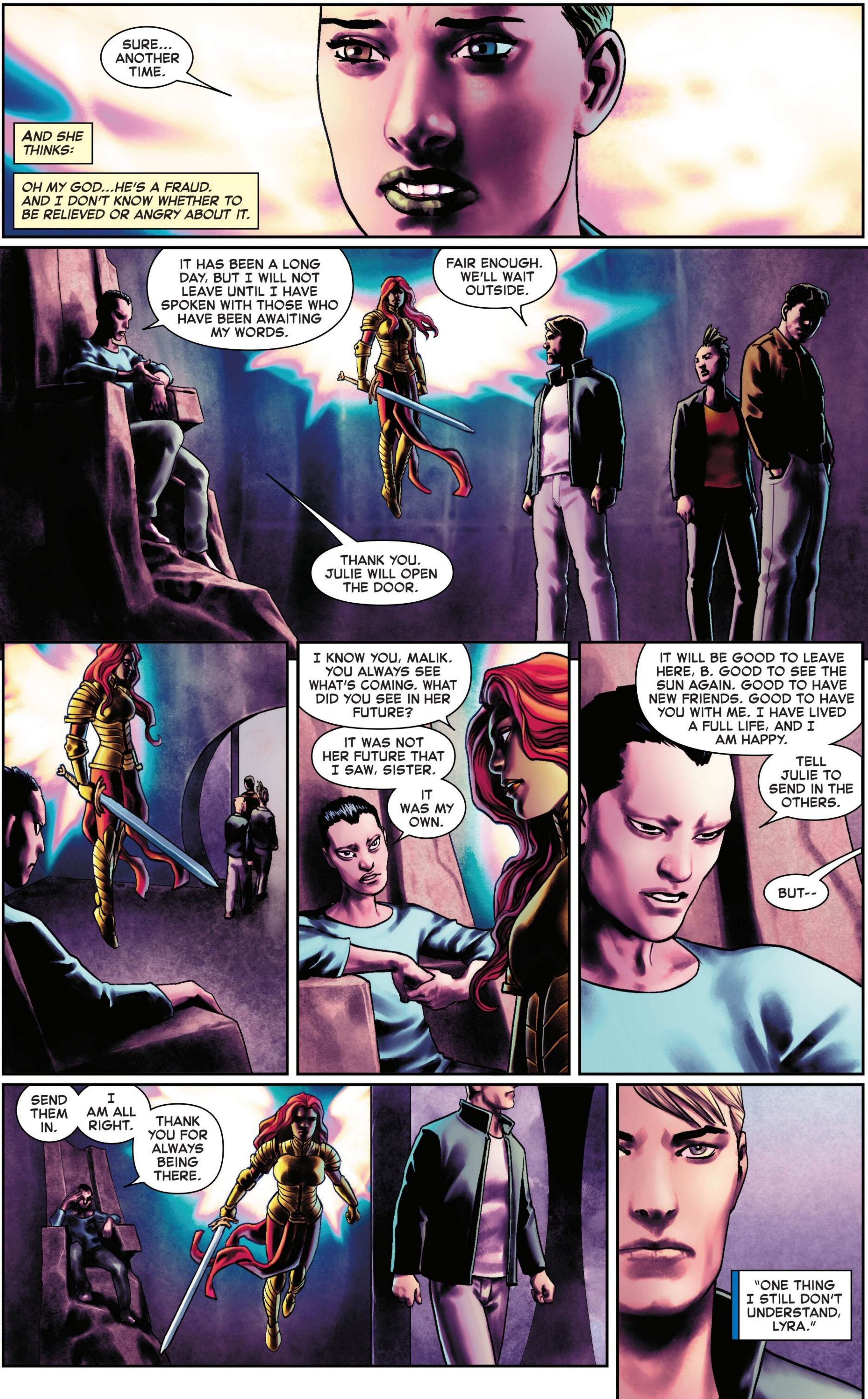

MALIK SAYS THAT YOU CAN *REGENERATE*, A POWER YOU *INHERITED* FROM YOUR *MOTHER.*
HOW CAN YOU KNOW--
AN ANCESTOR OF MINE *THREE HUNDRED YEARS* AGO COULD CONTROL THE *POWER COSMIC.* OVER *SIX GENERATIONS*, THAT POWER HAS REDUCED TO JUST A FRACTION OF WHAT IT ONCE WAS.
BUT DO YOU KNOW, DO YOU *UNDERSTAND*, WHAT EVEN A *FRACTION* OF THE *POWER COSMIC* CAN DO--
--TO YOU?
ZZZZAAAAPPPP?!
WHEN EVERY *CELL* IN YOUR *BODY* HAS BEEN REDUCED TO A SMOKING CINDER--
--WHAT EXACTLY WILL YOU USE TO *REGENERATE*--
--INSECT?
THAT'S ENOUGH.

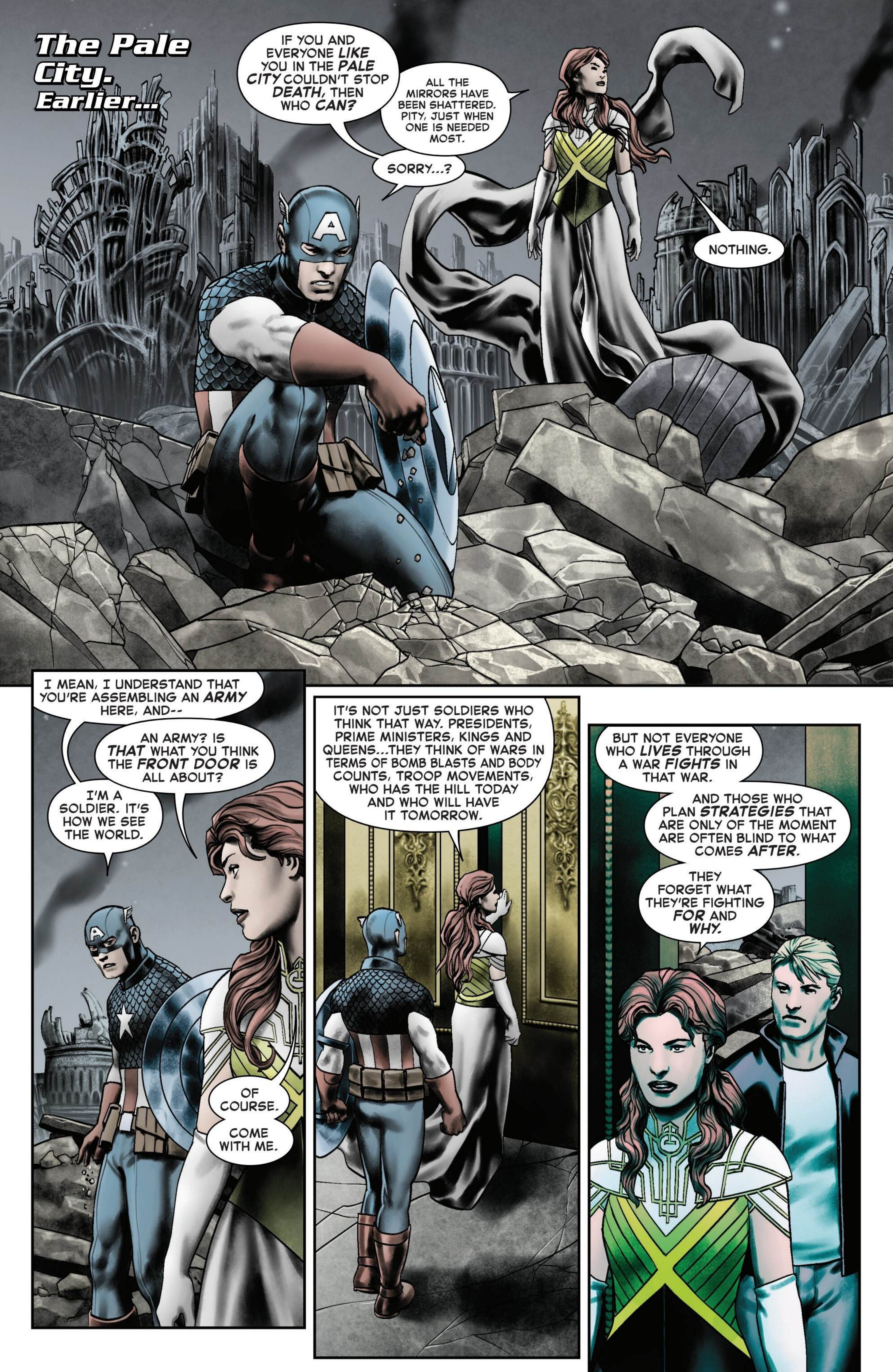

WE DIDN'T COME HERE FOR A FIGHT. IF YOU WANT CARLOS, YOU'LL HAVE TO COME THROUGH ME FIRST.
AND JUST FOR THE RECORD: NO ONE HAS EVER MANAGED TO DO THAT.
LET ME SHOW YOU WHY.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, B.
LET THEM THROUGH. THIS WAS ALWAYS GOING TO HAPPEN.
AS YOU WISH, MALIK.
MY APOLOGIES. MY SISTER--SISTER BY *CHOICE*, NOT BY BLOOD--IS VERY PROTECTIVE OF ME.
WITH PLENTY OF REASON.
BUT IF WE ARE TO SURVIVE THE DARKNESS THAT IS COMING, WE CANNOT FIGHT AMONG OURSELVES. THERE MUST BE PEACE--
--EVEN IF ONLY FOR A LITTLE WHILE.
LYRA SAID I WOULD KNOW HIM WHEN I SAW HIM. SHE WAS RIGHT.

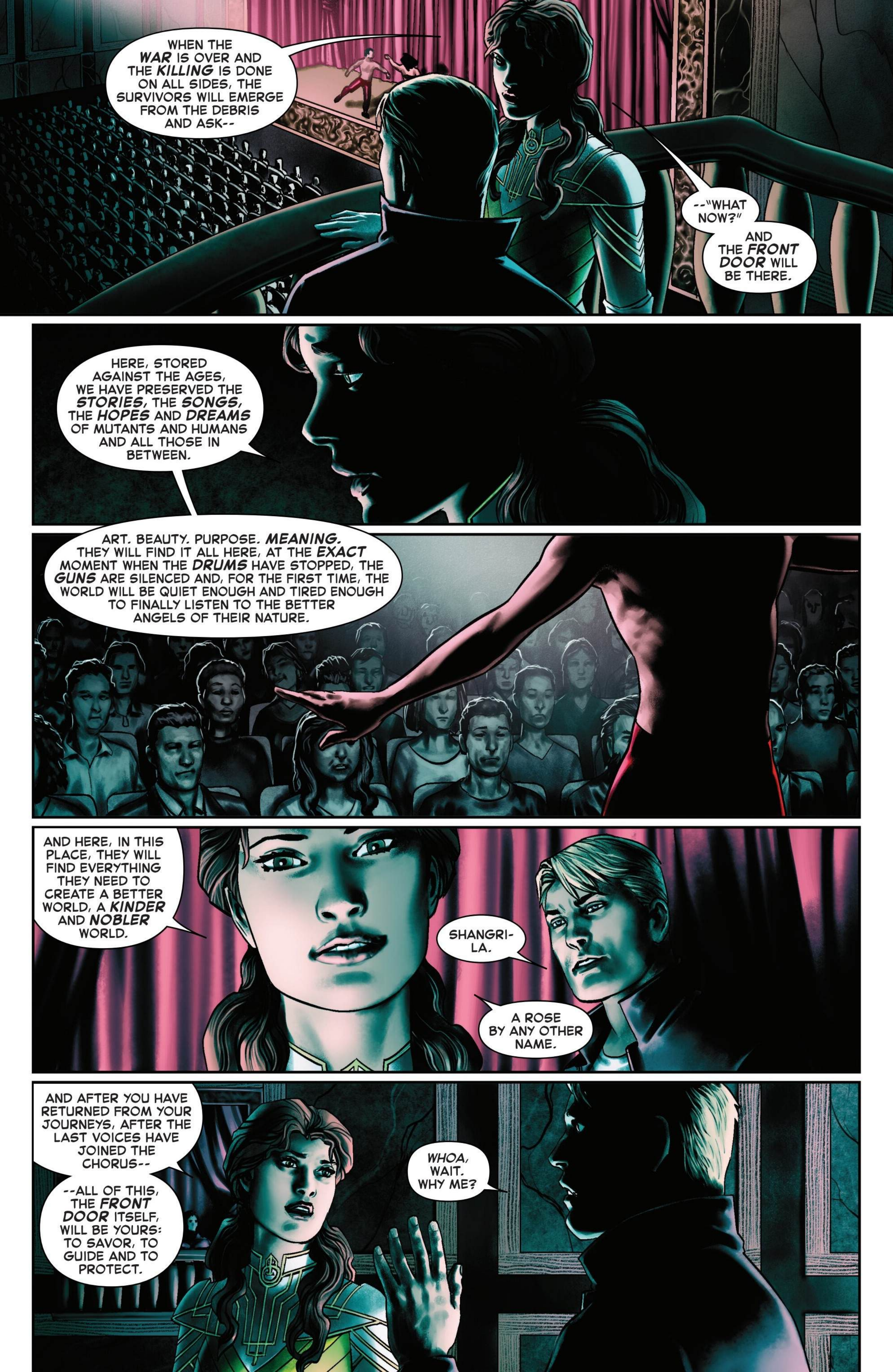

STANDING THIS CLOSE FEELS LIKE BEING NEAR A POWER PLANT...I CAN FEEL THE HAIRS ON MY ARMS STANDING UP.
SO, WHAT IS IT EXACTLY THAT YOU *DO?* WHAT'S YOUR *POWER?*
CARLOS--
IT'S ALL RIGHT...A FAIR QUESTION.
I WALK IN THE DREAMS OF OTHERS, SEEING WHAT THEY SEE, FEELING WHAT THEY FEEL.
I CAN TAKE THE PAIN OF OTHERS INTO MYSELF, FREEING THEM FROM THAT AGONY--
AT GREAT COST TO YOURSELF. I'VE SEEN WHAT IT DOES TO YOU--
IT IS MY PURPOSE AND MY JOY. THE PAIN IS NOT A BURDEN.
THERE'S ALSO AN ENERGY ABOUT HIM...IF YOU LIE TO HIM WITH EVIL INTENT, YOU DIE.
NOT ENTIRELY CORRECT--
OKAYOKAYOKAY--
--THERE'S A SLIDING SCALE, ALL RIGHT? THE BIGGER THE LIE, THE MORE EVIL THE INTENT, THE BIGGER THE PENALTY.
AND WHAT IS THE PENALTY AT THE MORE BENIGN END?
AN UPSET STOMACH.
BUT IT'S STILL NO FUN, SO WATCH IT. AND LASTLY--
LASTLY...IT IS MY BURDEN TO PEER INTO THE FUTURE. TO SEE THE GRAINS OF SAND THAT LED TO THIS MOMENT, AND FOLLOW THEM TO WHAT IS YET TO HAPPEN.
THAT IS WHAT THOSE *OUTSIDE* ARE WAITING FOR ME TO *TELL* THEM.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR *YOUR* FUTURES?

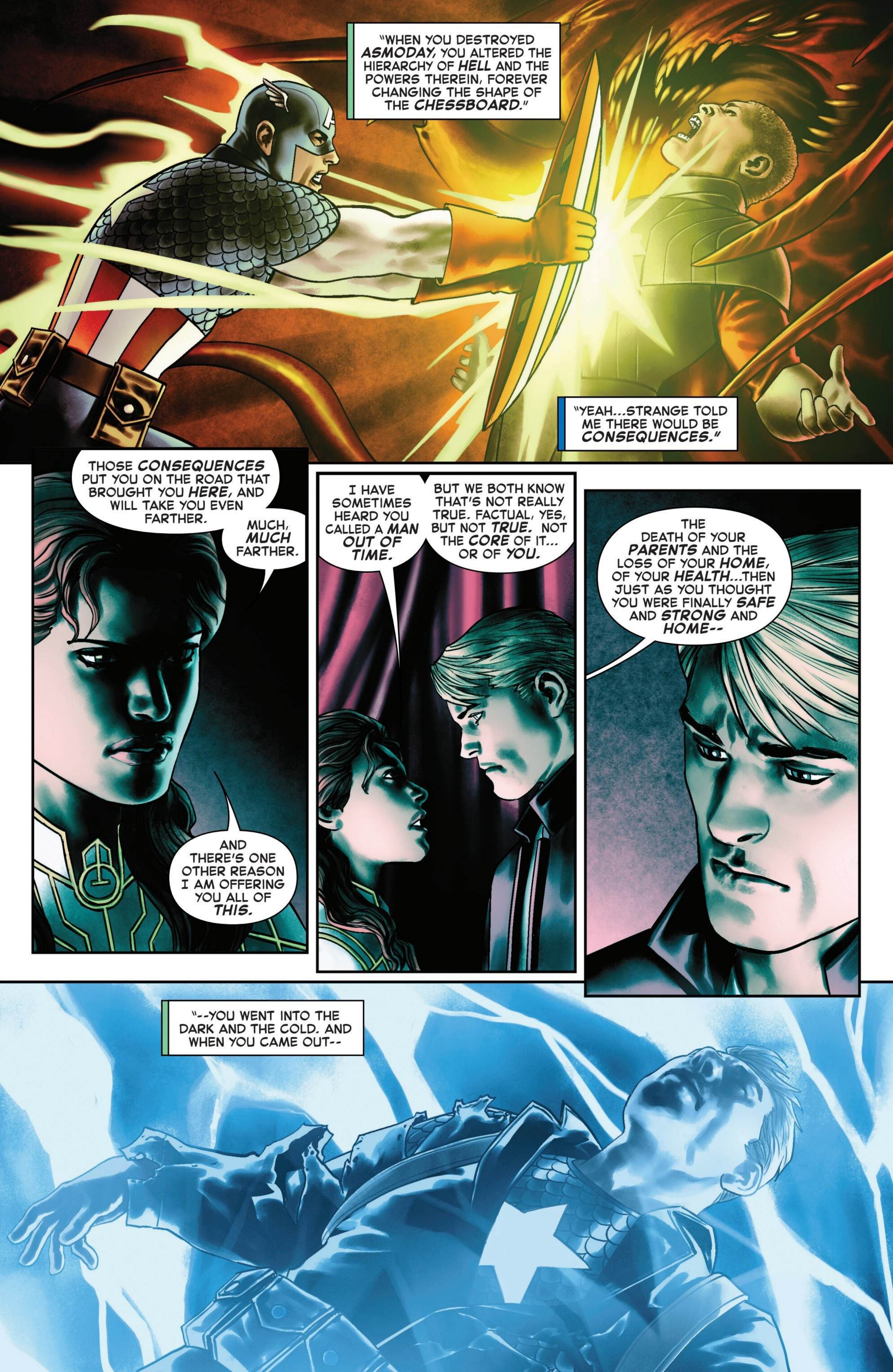

SURE. WHY NOT?
VERY WELL.
YOU COME FROM DUST, BUT YOU DID NOT COME ALONE. THE WOMAN IN WHITE CAME WITH YOU. THE DUST WANTS YOU BACK, AND SHE WANTS YOU BACK. THEY ARE HUNGRY, AND THEY WILL FOLLOW YOU AS LONG AS YOU LIVE, UNTIL THEY DEVOUR YOU.
BLOOD IS YOUR ONLY DEFENSE. BUT IT CANNOT BE YOURS AND IT WILL NOT BE HERS.
FIND THE BLOOD. EVEN KNOWING WHAT IT WILL COST. IT IS YOUR ONLY HOPE OF SURVIVAL.
DOES THAT MAKE ANY SENSE TO YOU?
YES, IT--
YOU SON OF A--
WHAT IS IT?
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.
CARLOS--
I SAID I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT.

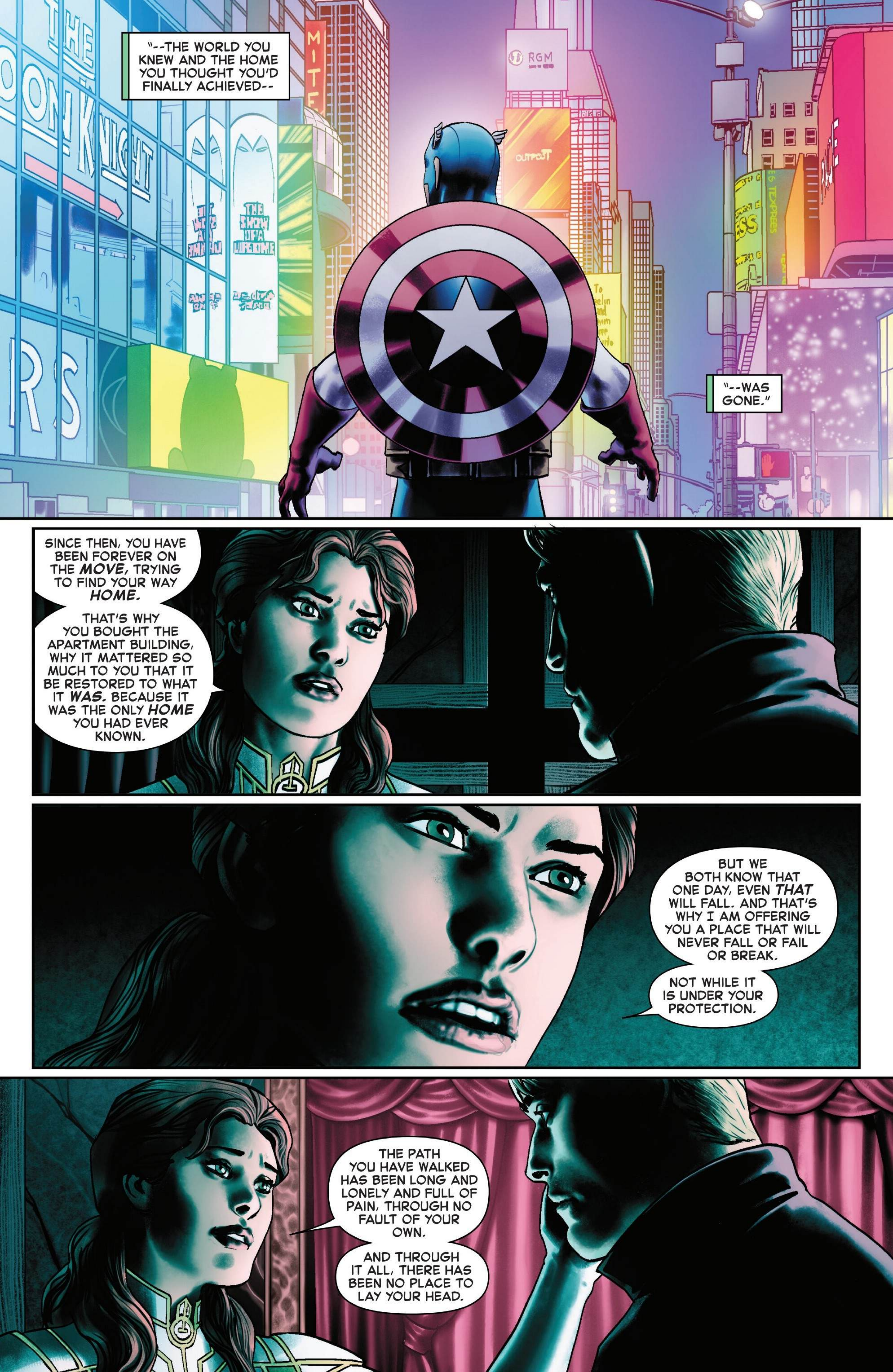

I WOULD TELL YOUR FUTURE, BUT YOU ALREADY **KNOW** IT. SHE HAS **TOLD** YOU.
YES.
AND YOU ACCEPT?
"YES."
THEN YOU NEED NOTHING MORE FROM ME.
AND SHE THINKS:
HE'S GOING TO KNOW.
NOW, TO YOU--
AND SHE THINKS:
HE'S GOING TO KNOW WHAT I'M ***HERE*** *FOR...WHAT I'M HERE TO* ***DO.*** *AND HE WILL HAVE* ***HER*** *KILL ME FOR IT.*
I DO NOT SEE ANYTHING. PERHAPS ANOTHER TIME.

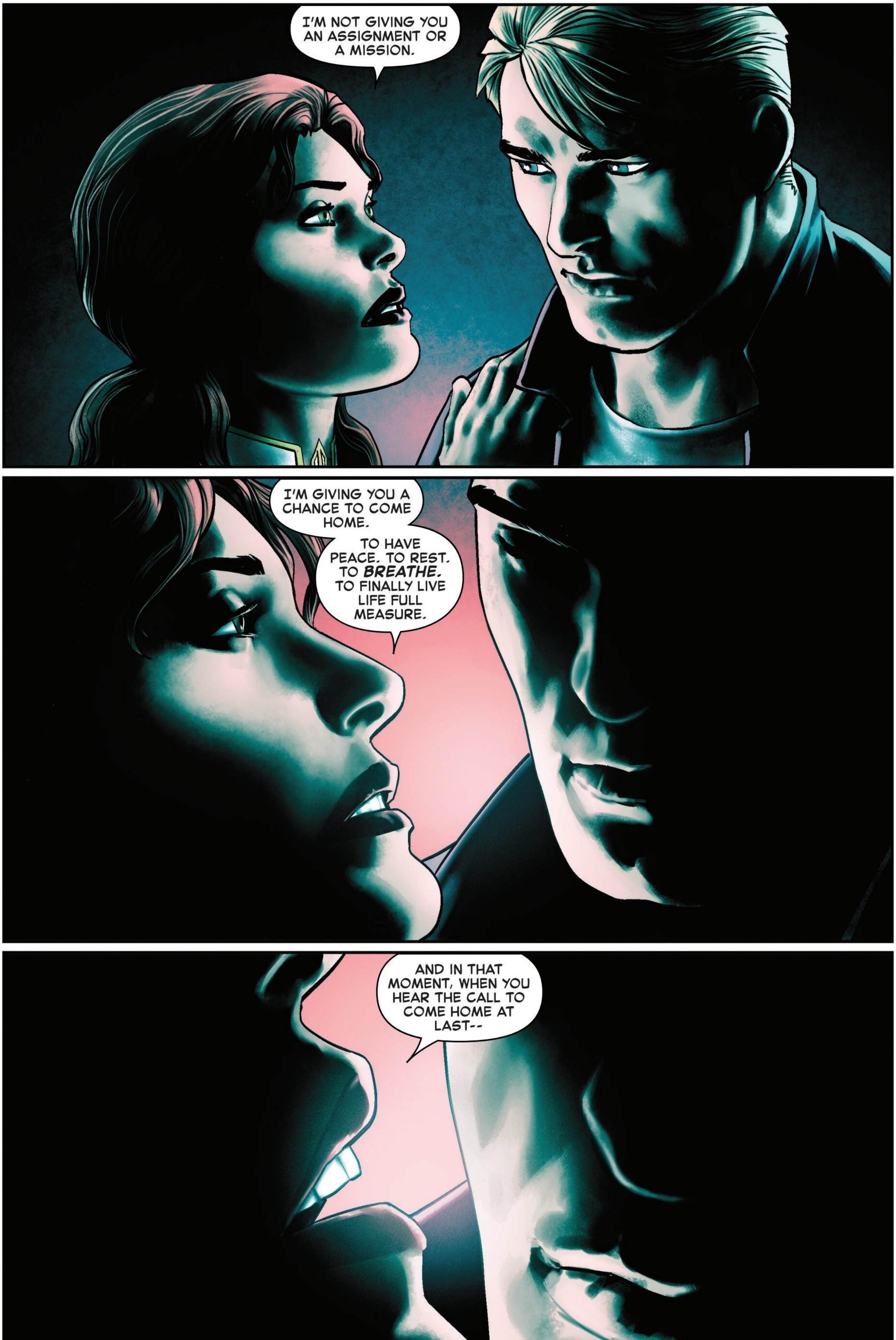

SURE... ANOTHER TIME.
AND SHE THINKS:
OH MY GOD...HE'S A FRAUD. AND I DON'T KNOW WHETHER TO BE RELIEVED OR ANGRY ABOUT IT.
IT HAS BEEN A LONG DAY, BUT I WILL NOT LEAVE UNTIL I HAVE SPOKEN WITH THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN AWAITING MY WORDS.
FAIR ENOUGH. WE'LL WAIT OUTSIDE.
THANK YOU. JULIE WILL OPEN THE DOOR.
I KNOW YOU, MALIK. YOU ALWAYS SEE WHAT'S COMING. WHAT DID YOU SEE IN HER FUTURE?
IT WAS NOT HER FUTURE THAT I SAW, SISTER.
IT WAS MY OWN.
IT WILL BE GOOD TO LEAVE HERE, B. GOOD TO SEE THE SUN AGAIN. GOOD TO HAVE NEW FRIENDS. GOOD TO HAVE YOU WITH ME. I HAVE LIVED A FULL LIFE, AND I AM HAPPY.
TELL JULIE TO SEND IN THE OTHERS.
BUT--
SEND THEM IN.
I AM ALL RIGHT.
THANK YOU FOR ALWAYS BEING THERE.
"ONE THING I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, LYRA."

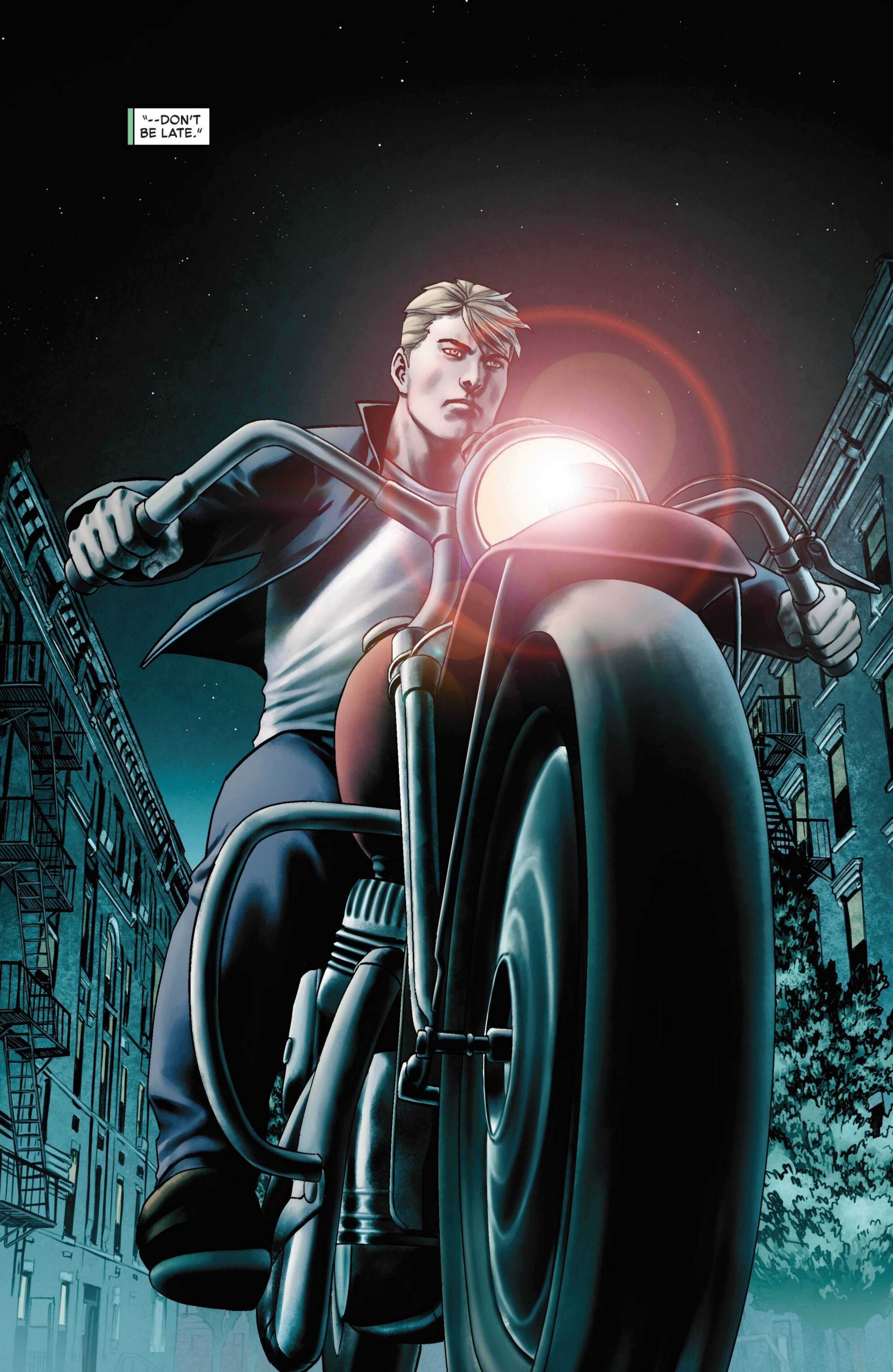

The Pale City. Earlier...
IF YOU AND EVERYONE LIKE YOU IN THE PALE CITY COULDN'T STOP DEATH, THEN WHO CAN?
ALL THE MIRRORS HAVE BEEN SHATTERED. PITY, JUST WHEN ONE IS NEEDED MOST.
SORRY...?
NOTHING.
I MEAN, I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'RE ASSEMBLING AN ARMY HERE, AND--
AN ARMY? IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK THE FRONT DOOR IS ALL ABOUT?
I'M A SOLDIER. IT'S HOW WE SEE THE WORLD.
OF COURSE.
COME WITH ME.
IT'S NOT JUST SOLDIERS WHO THINK THAT WAY. PRESIDENTS, PRIME MINISTERS, KINGS AND QUEENS...THEY THINK OF WARS IN TERMS OF BOMB BLASTS AND BODY COUNTS, TROOP MOVEMENTS, WHO HAS THE HILL TODAY AND WHO WILL HAVE IT TOMORROW.
BUT NOT EVERYONE WHO LIVES THROUGH A WAR FIGHTS IN THAT WAR.
AND THOSE WHO PLAN STRATEGIES THAT ARE ONLY OF THE MOMENT ARE OFTEN BLIND TO WHAT COMES AFTER.
THEY FORGET WHAT THEY'RE FIGHTING FOR AND WHY.

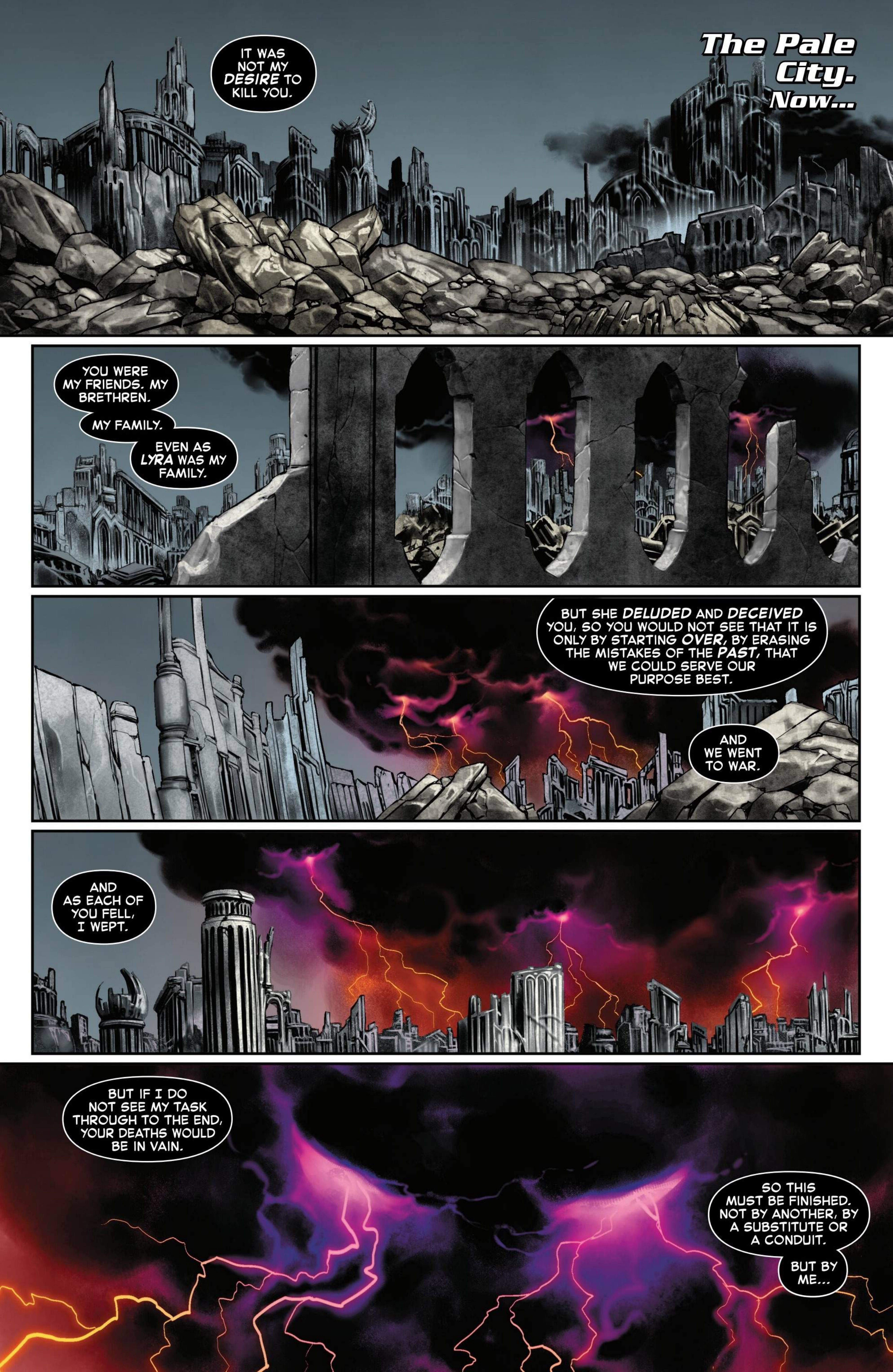

WHEN THE *WAR* IS OVER AND THE *KILLING* IS DONE ON ALL SIDES, THE SURVIVORS WILL EMERGE FROM THE DEBRIS AND ASK--
--"WHAT NOW?" AND THE *FRONT DOOR* WILL BE THERE.
HERE, STORED AGAINST THE AGES, WE HAVE PRESERVED THE *STORIES*, THE *SONGS*, THE *HOPES* AND *DREAMS* OF MUTANTS AND HUMANS AND ALL THOSE IN BETWEEN.
ART. BEAUTY. PURPOSE. *MEANING.* THEY WILL FIND IT ALL HERE, AT THE *EXACT* MOMENT WHEN THE *DRUMS* HAVE STOPPED, THE *GUNS* ARE SILENCED AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE WORLD WILL BE QUIET ENOUGH AND TIRED ENOUGH TO FINALLY LISTEN TO THE BETTER ANGELS OF THEIR NATURE.
AND HERE, IN THIS PLACE, THEY WILL FIND EVERYTHING THEY NEED TO CREATE A BETTER WORLD, A *KINDER* AND *NOBLER* WORLD.
SHANGRI-LA.
A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME.
AND AFTER YOU HAVE RETURNED FROM YOUR JOURNEYS, AFTER THE LAST VOICES HAVE JOINED THE CHORUS--
--ALL OF THIS, THE *FRONT DOOR* ITSELF, WILL BE YOURS: TO SAVOR, TO GUIDE AND TO PROTECT.
WHOA, WAIT. WHY ME?

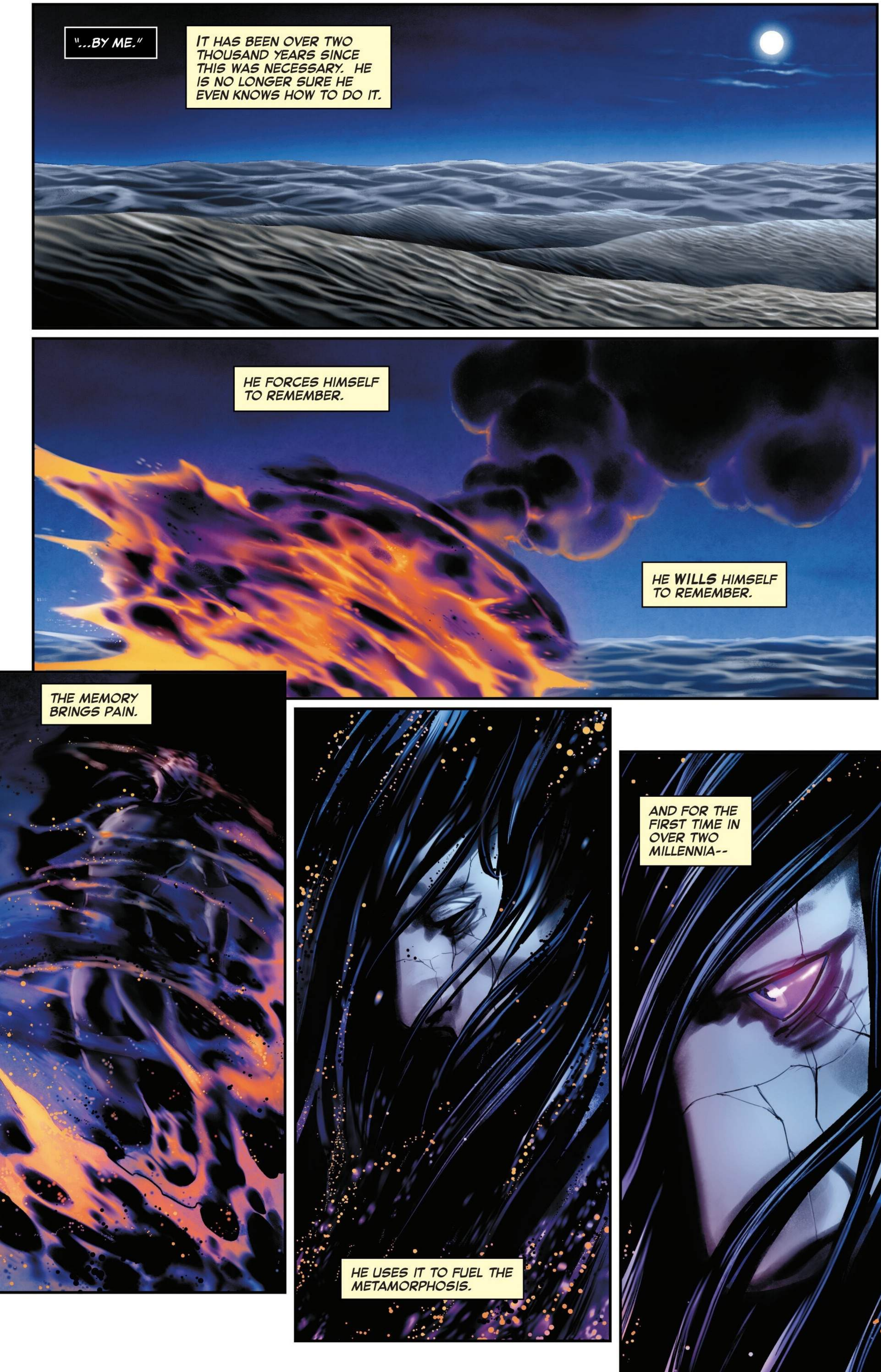

"WHEN YOU DESTROYED ASMODAY, YOU ALTERED THE HIERARCHY OF HELL AND THE POWERS THEREIN, FOREVER CHANGING THE SHAPE OF THE CHESSBOARD."
"YEAH...STRANGE TOLD ME THERE WOULD BE CONSEQUENCES."
THOSE CONSEQUENCES PUT YOU ON THE ROAD THAT BROUGHT YOU HERE, AND WILL TAKE YOU EVEN FARTHER.
MUCH, MUCH FARTHER.
AND THERE'S ONE OTHER REASON I AM OFFERING YOU ALL OF THIS.
I HAVE SOMETIMES HEARD YOU CALLED A MAN OUT OF TIME.
BUT WE BOTH KNOW THAT'S NOT REALLY TRUE. FACTUAL, YES, BUT NOT TRUE. NOT THE CORE OF IT... OR OF YOU.
THE DEATH OF YOUR PARENTS AND THE LOSS OF YOUR HOME, OF YOUR HEALTH...THEN JUST AS YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE FINALLY SAFE AND STRONG AND HOME--
"--YOU WENT INTO THE DARK AND THE COLD. AND WHEN YOU CAME OUT--

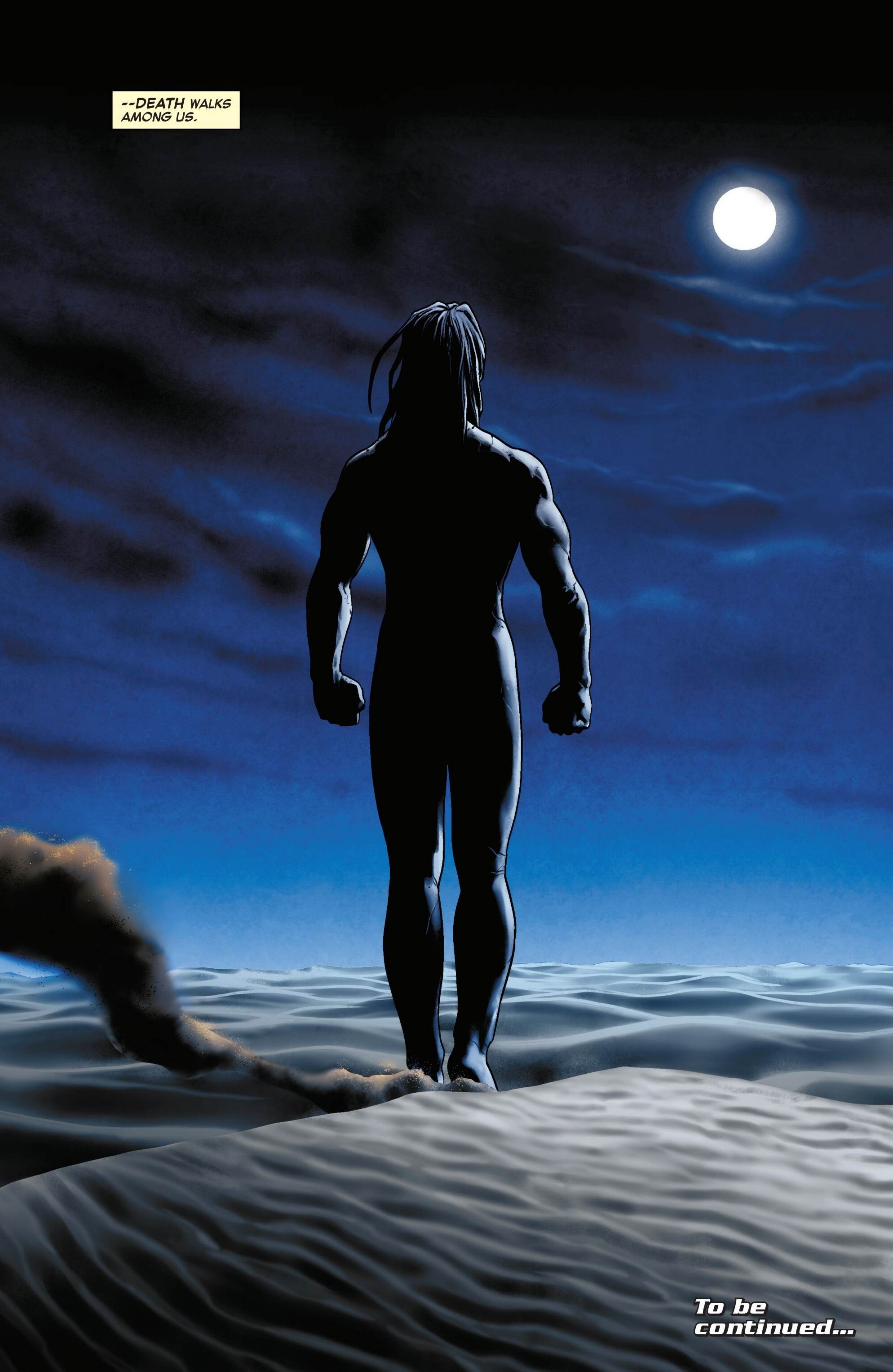

"--THE WORLD YOU KNEW AND THE HOME YOU THOUGHT YOU'D FINALLY ACHIEVED--
THE
OON KNIGHT
THE SHOW OF A LIFETIME
RGM
OUTPOST
"--WAS GONE."
SINCE THEN, YOU HAVE BEEN FOREVER ON THE *MOVE,* TRYING TO FIND YOUR WAY *HOME.*
THAT'S WHY YOU BOUGHT THE APARTMENT BUILDING, WHY IT MATTERED SO MUCH TO YOU THAT IT BE RESTORED TO WHAT IT *WAS.* BECAUSE IT WAS THE ONLY *HOME* YOU HAD EVER KNOWN.
BUT WE BOTH KNOW THAT ONE DAY, EVEN *THAT* WILL FALL. AND THAT'S WHY I AM OFFERING YOU A PLACE THAT WILL NEVER FALL OR FAIL OR BREAK.
NOT WHILE IT IS UNDER YOUR PROTECTION.
THE PATH YOU HAVE WALKED HAS BEEN LONG AND LONELY AND FULL OF PAIN, THROUGH NO FAULT OF YOUR OWN.
AND THROUGH IT ALL, THERE HAS BEEN NO PLACE TO LAY YOUR HEAD.

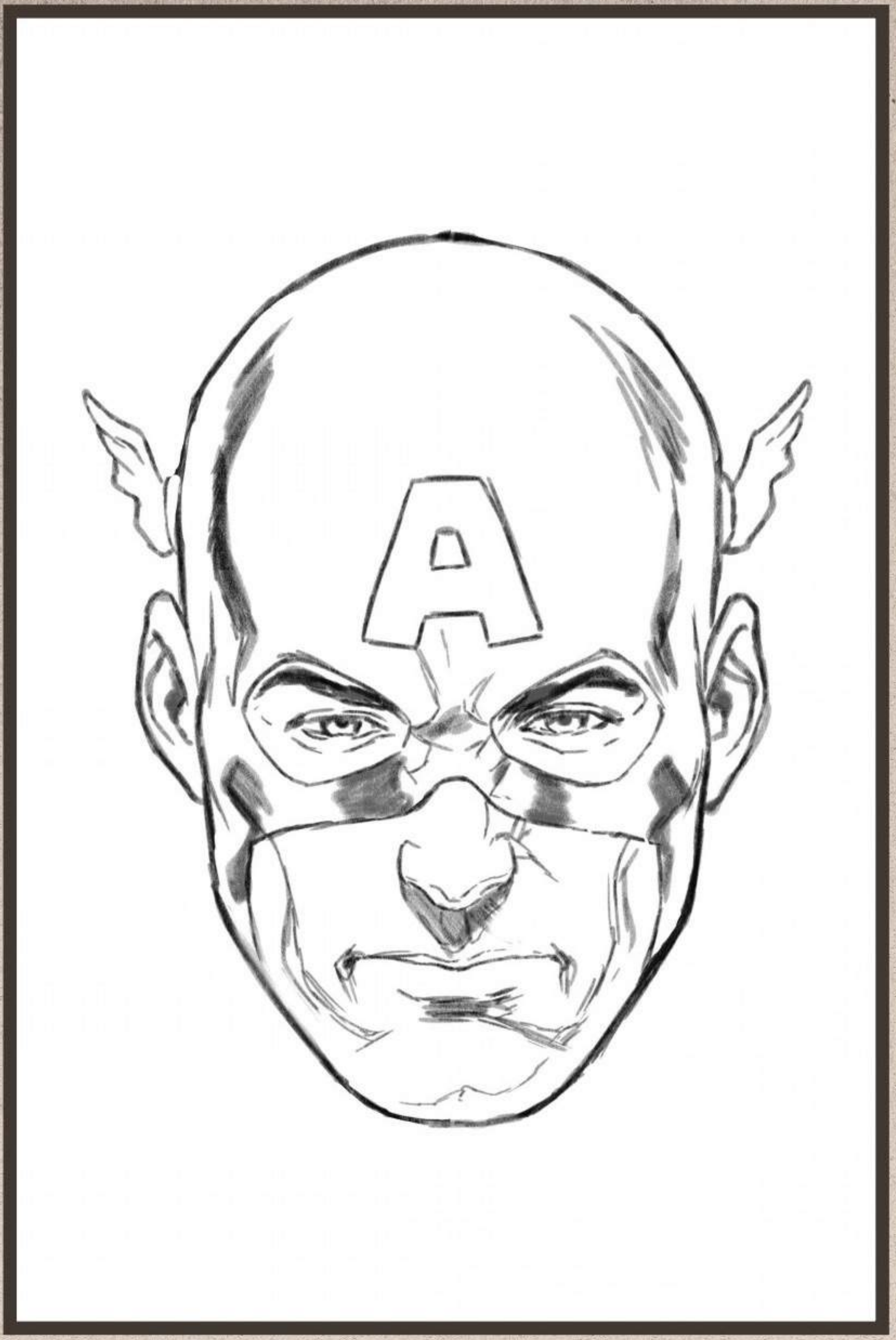

I'M NOT GIVING YOU AN ASSIGNMENT OR A MISSION.
I'M GIVING YOU A CHANCE TO COME HOME.
TO HAVE PEACE. TO REST. TO *BREATHE.* TO FINALLY LIVE LIFE FULL MEASURE.
AND IN THAT MOMENT, WHEN YOU HEAR THE CALL TO COME HOME AT LAST--


"--DON'T BE LATE."


The Pale City. Now...
IT WAS NOT MY DESIRE TO KILL YOU.
YOU WERE MY FRIENDS. MY BRETHREN.
MY FAMILY.
EVEN AS LYRA WAS MY FAMILY.
BUT SHE DELUDED AND DECEIVED YOU, SO YOU WOULD NOT SEE THAT IT IS ONLY BY STARTING OVER, BY ERASING THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST, THAT WE COULD SERVE OUR PURPOSE BEST.
AND WE WENT TO WAR.
AND AS EACH OF YOU FELL, I WEPT.
BUT IF I DO NOT SEE MY TASK THROUGH TO THE END, YOUR DEATHS WOULD BE IN VAIN.
SO THIS MUST BE FINISHED. NOT BY ANOTHER, BY A SUBSTITUTE OR A CONDUIT.
BUT BY ME...


"...BY ME."
IT HAS BEEN OVER TWO THOUSAND YEARS SINCE THIS WAS NECESSARY. HE IS NO LONGER SURE HE EVEN KNOWS HOW TO DO IT.
HE FORCES HIMSELF TO REMEMBER.
HE **WILLS** HIMSELF TO REMEMBER.
THE MEMORY BRINGS PAIN.
HE USES IT TO FUEL THE METAMORPHOSIS.
AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER TWO MILLENNIA--


--DEATH WALKS AMONG US.
To be continued...



#7 HEADSHOT SKETCH VARIANT BY
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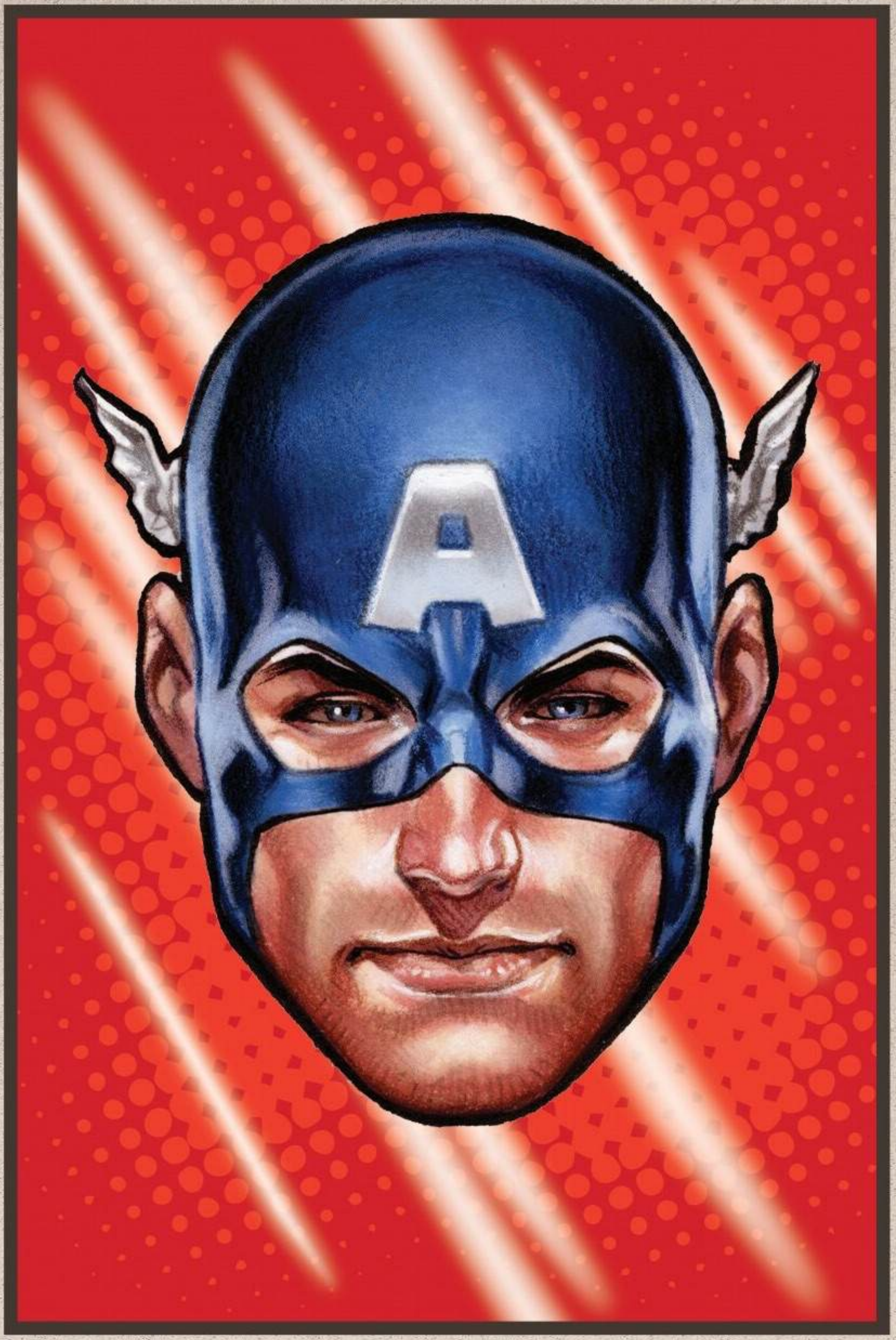

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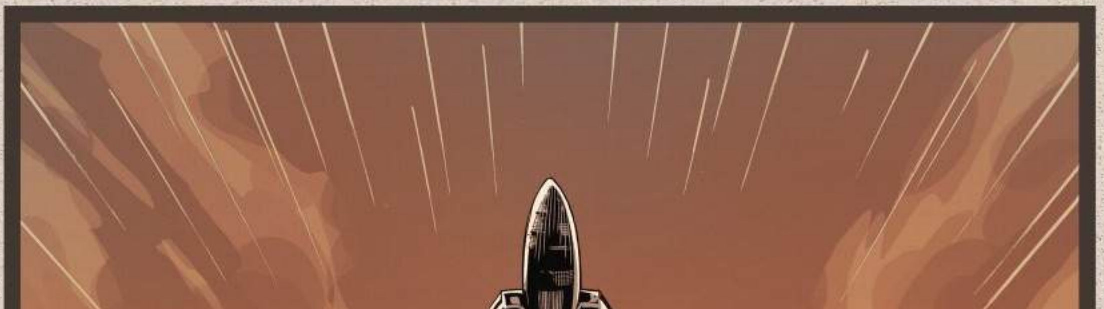
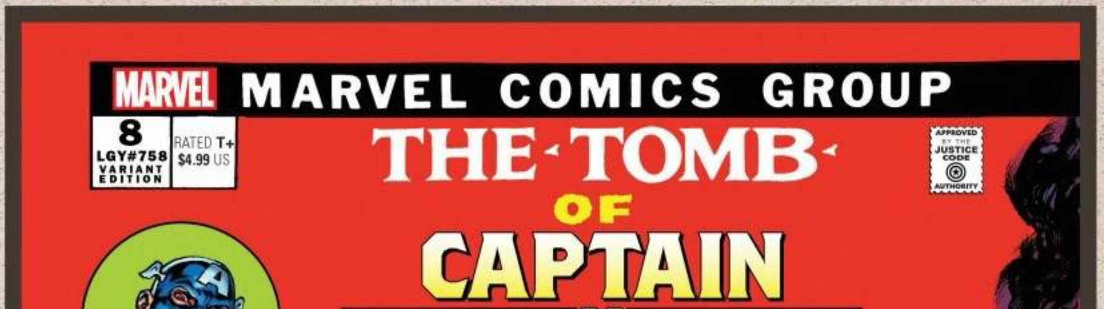


#7 VARIANT BY
STEPHEN MOONEY & **ROMULO FAJARDO JR.**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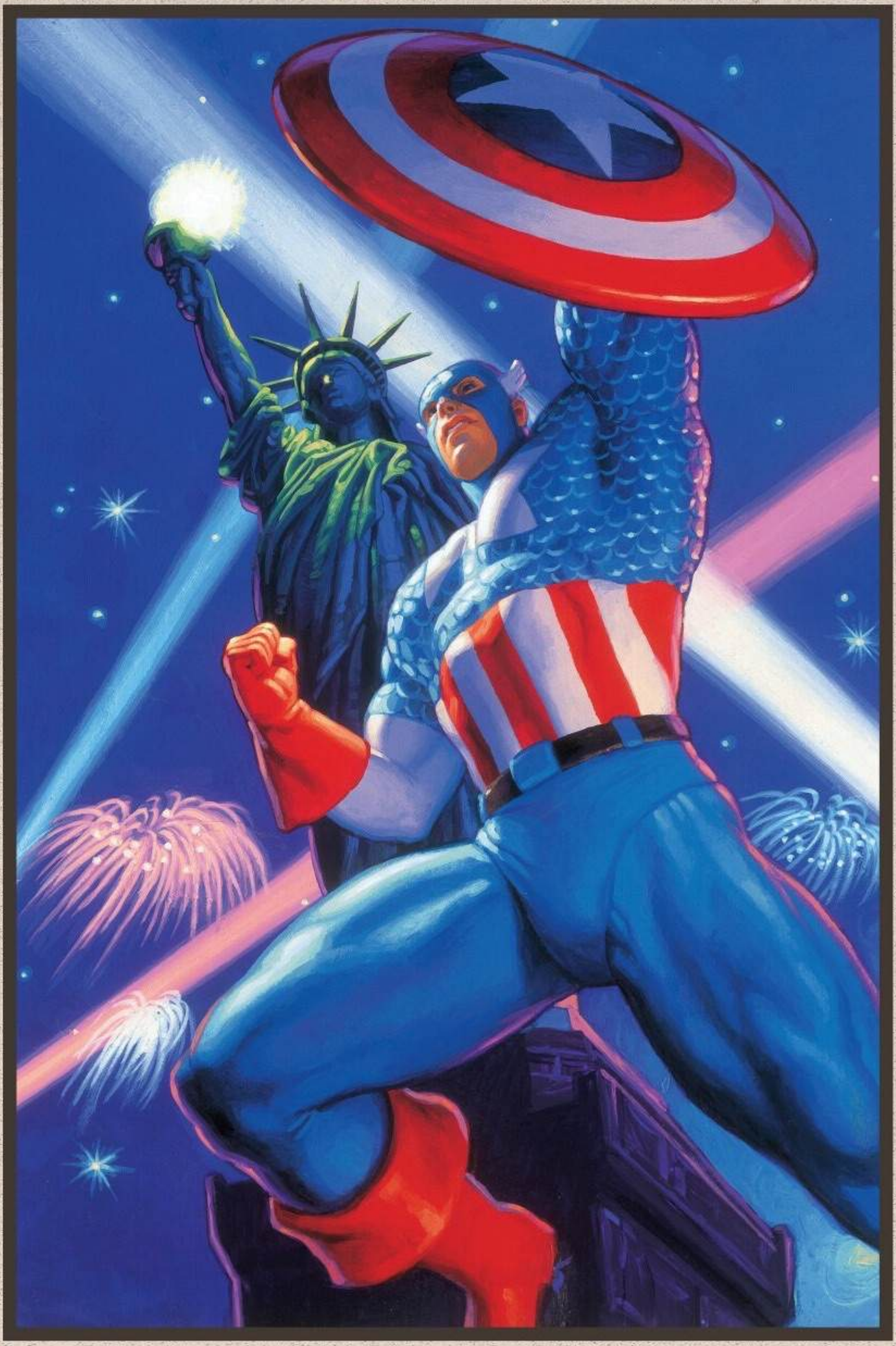
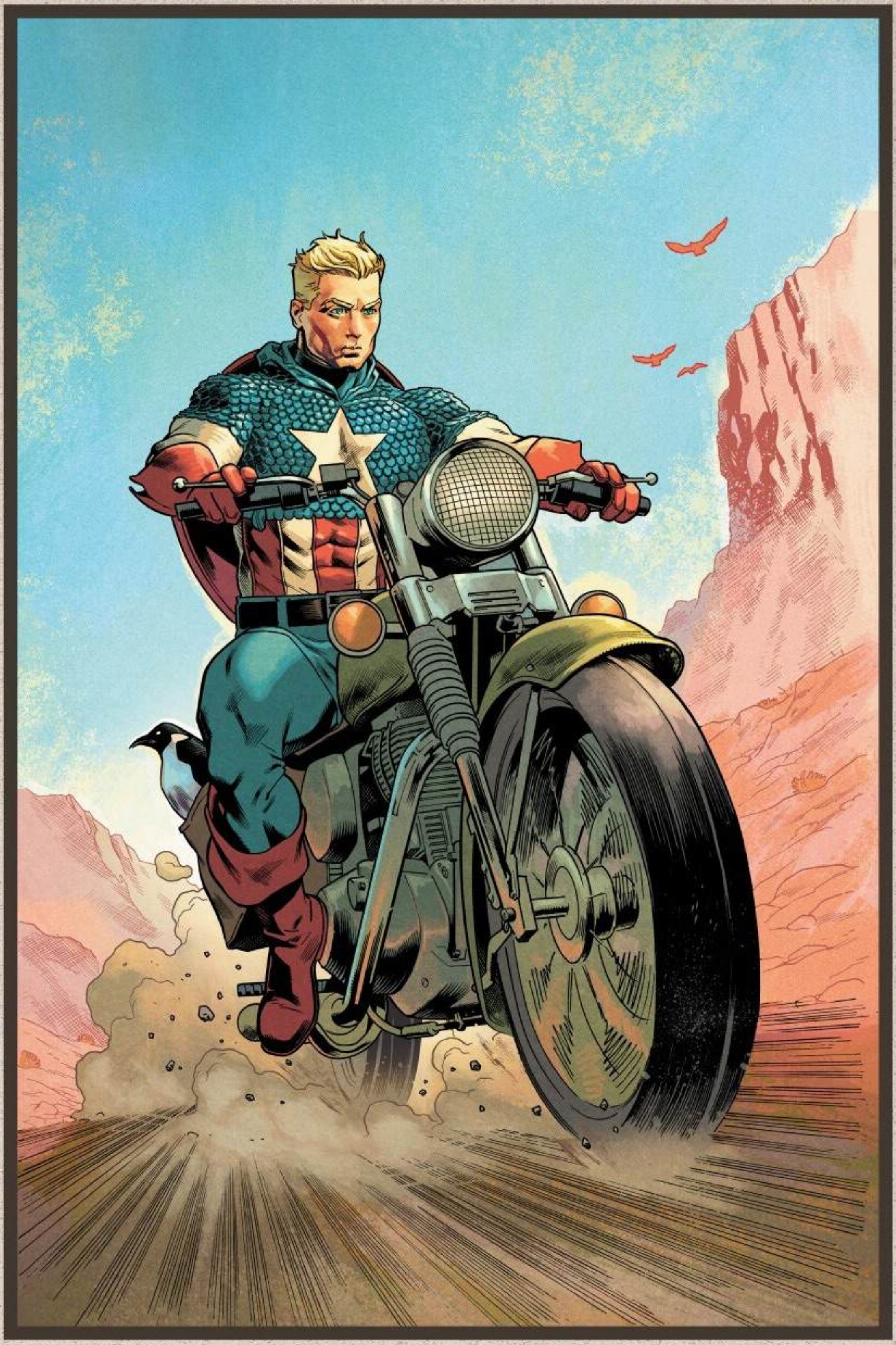
BACK, SWINE! BEFORE YOU AROUSE THE WRATH OF DRACULA!
NO! WE'VE GOT YOU NOW, MONSTER! THIS TIME YOU'RE DOOMED!
BURN CASTLE DRACULA! BURN IT TO THE GROUND!
TO SLAY A VAMPIRE!

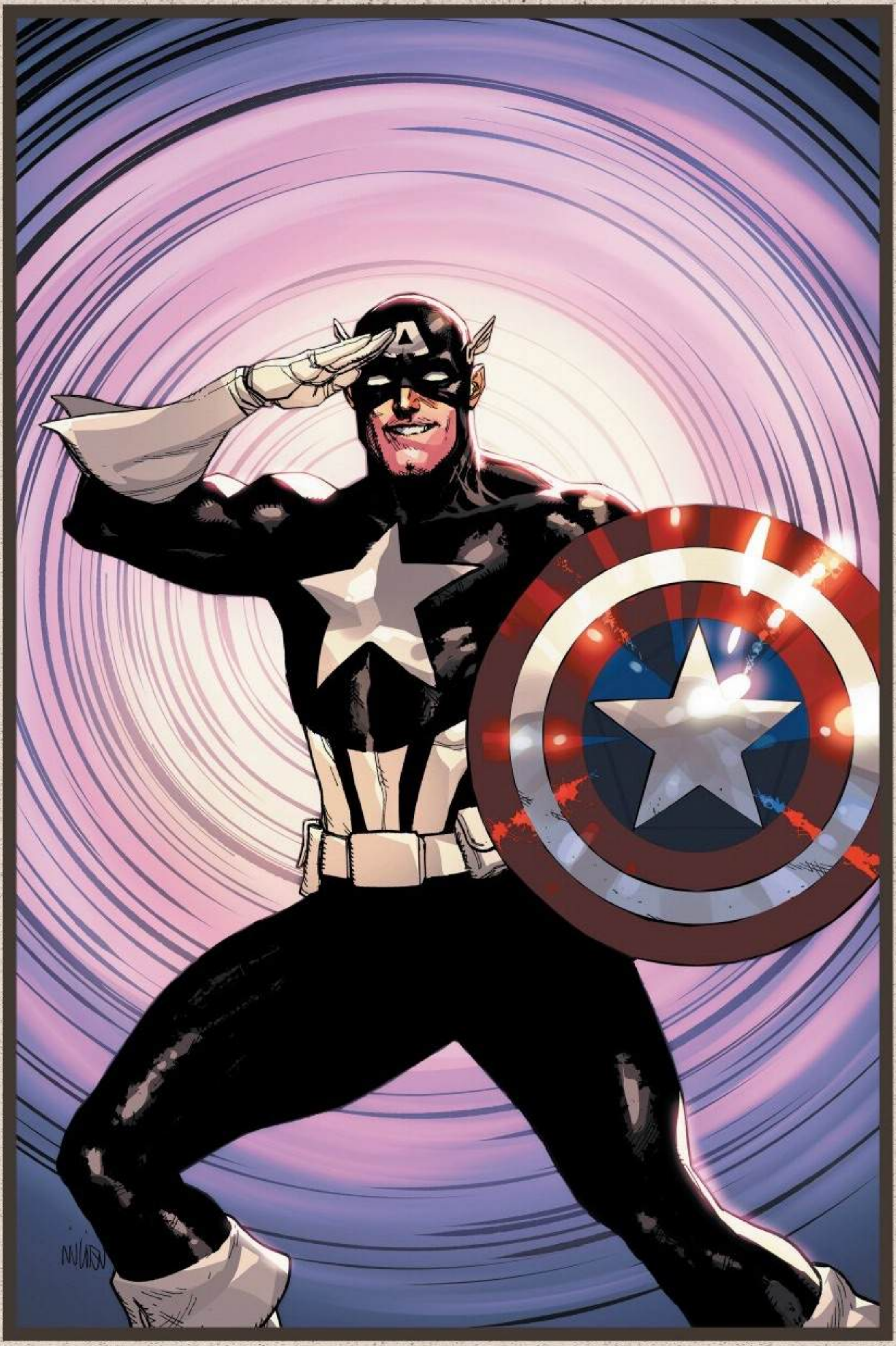
#8 VAMPIRE VARIANT BY
DAVID YARDIN & **EDGAR DELGADO**



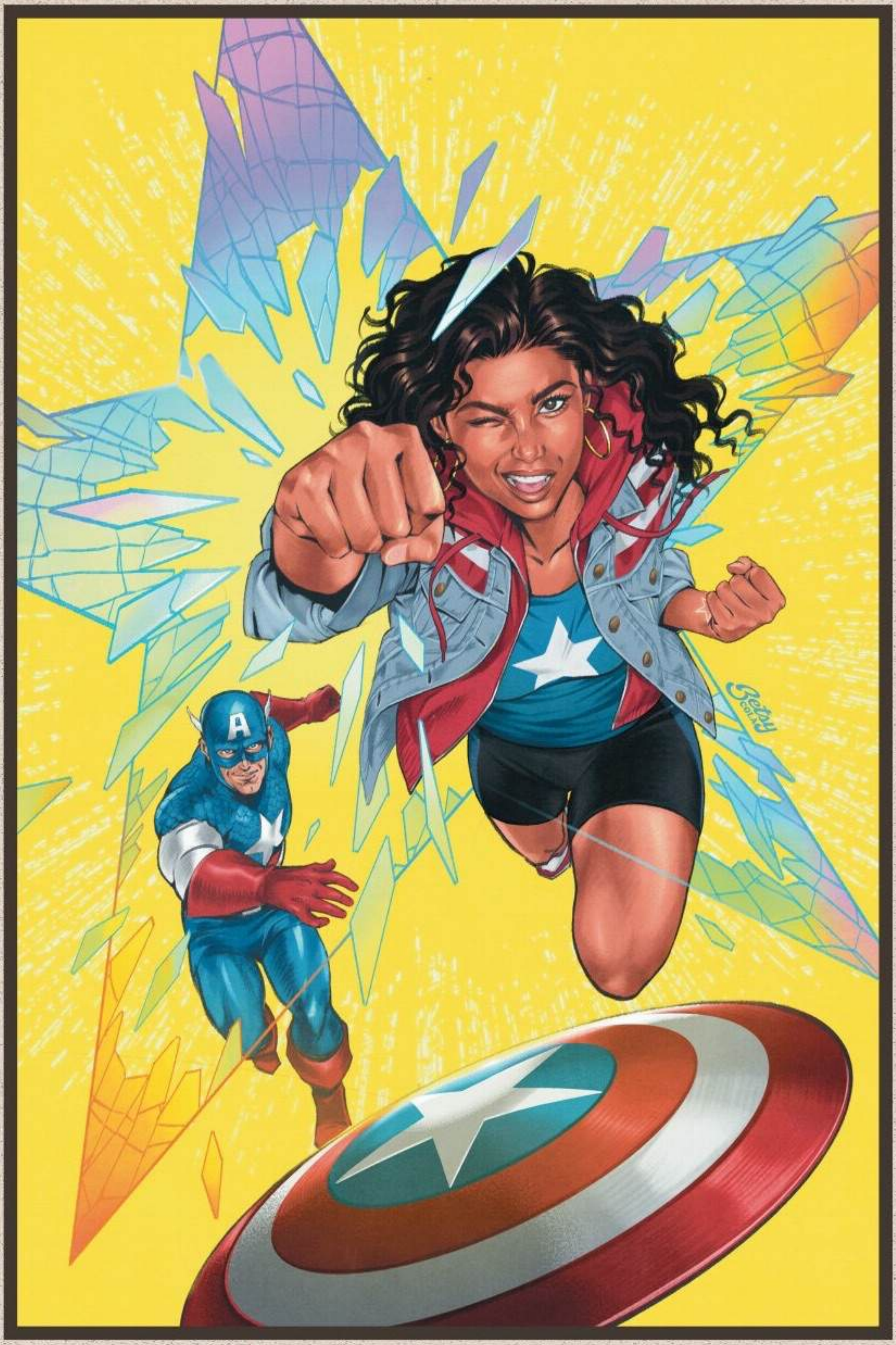
#8 MARVEL MASTERPIECES III VARIANT BY
GREG & TIM HILDEBRANDT



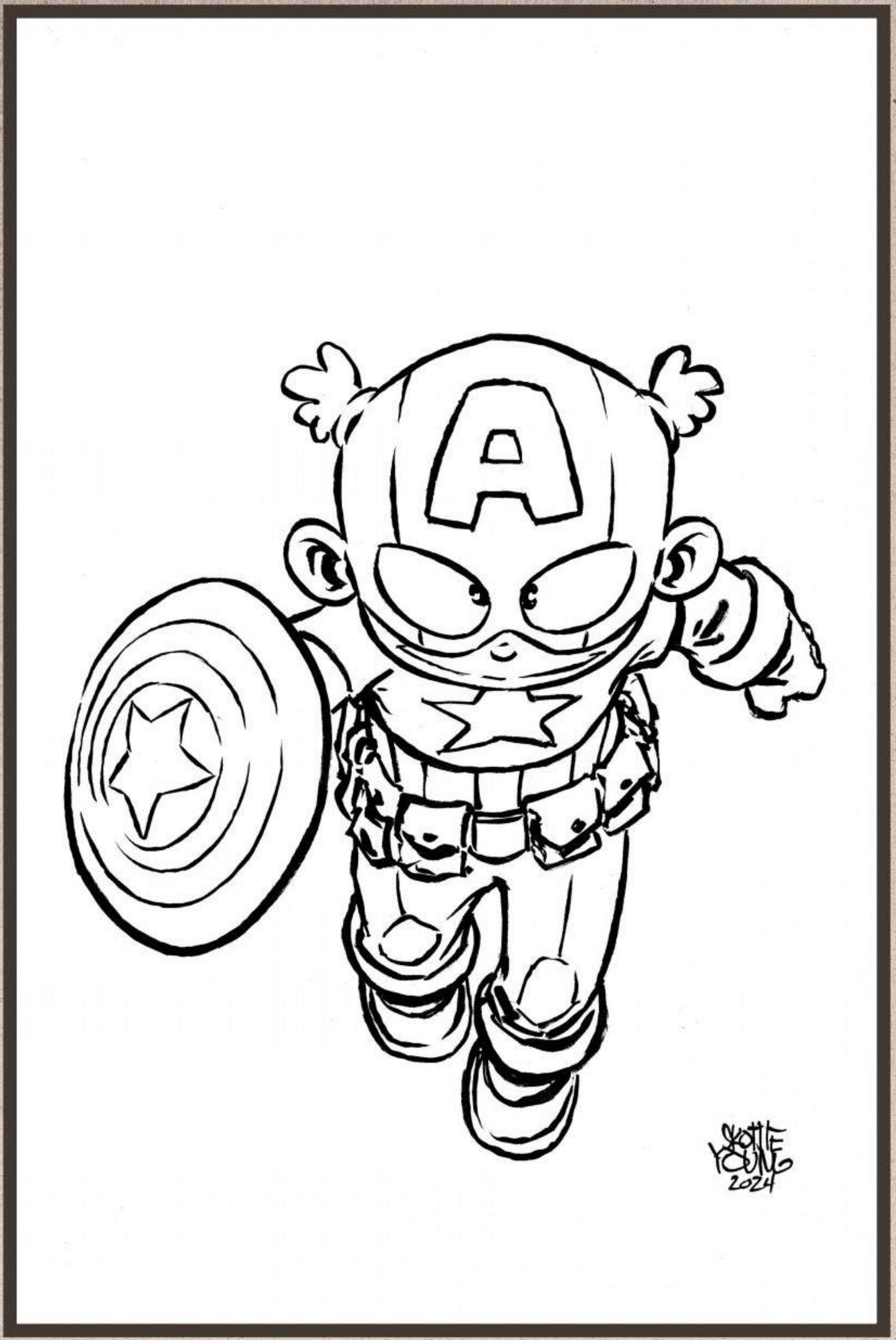
#9 VARIANT BY
MIKE HAWTHORNE & MATTHEW WILSON



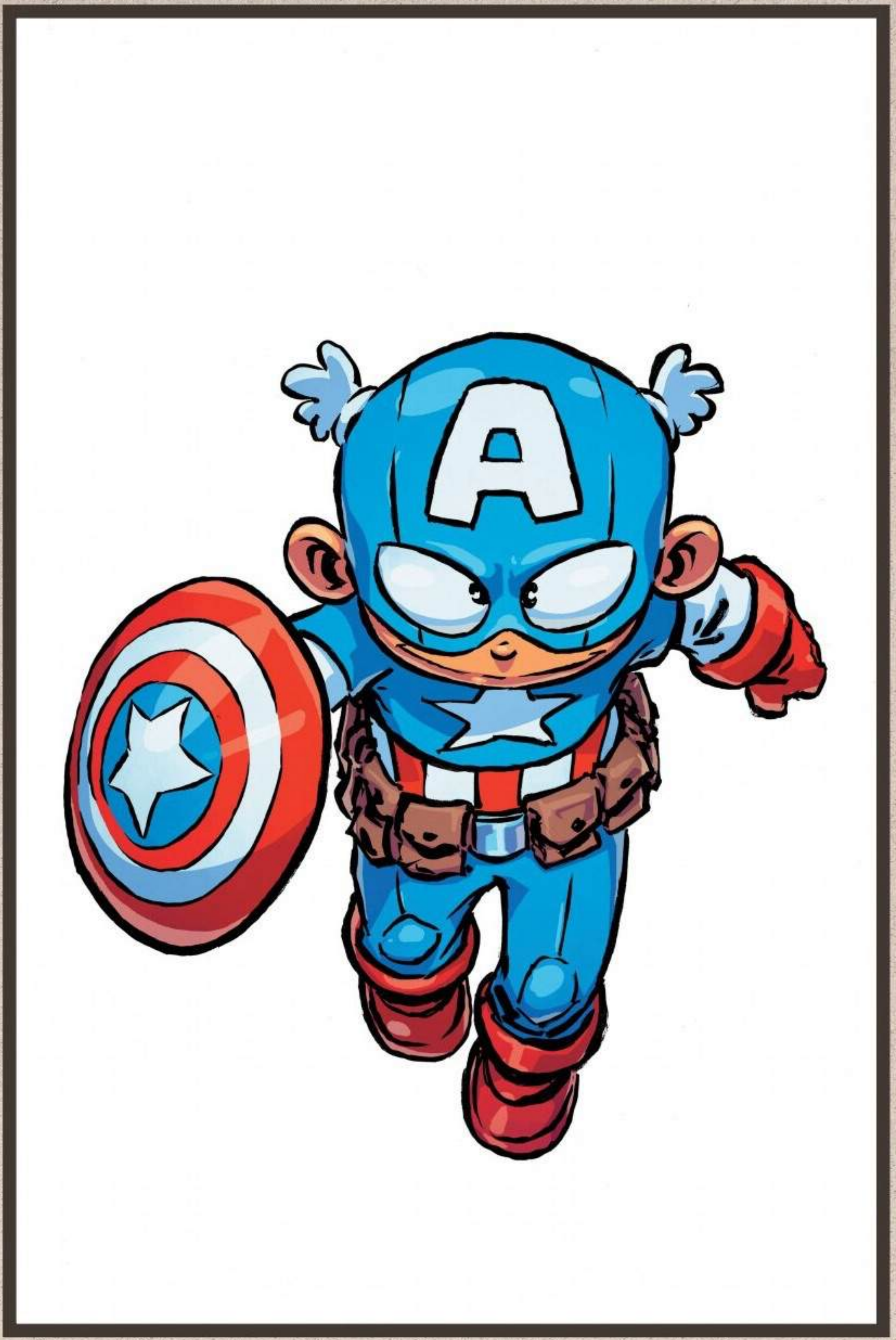
#9 BLACK COSTUME VARIANT BY
LEINIL FRANCIS YU & ROMULO FAJARDO JR.



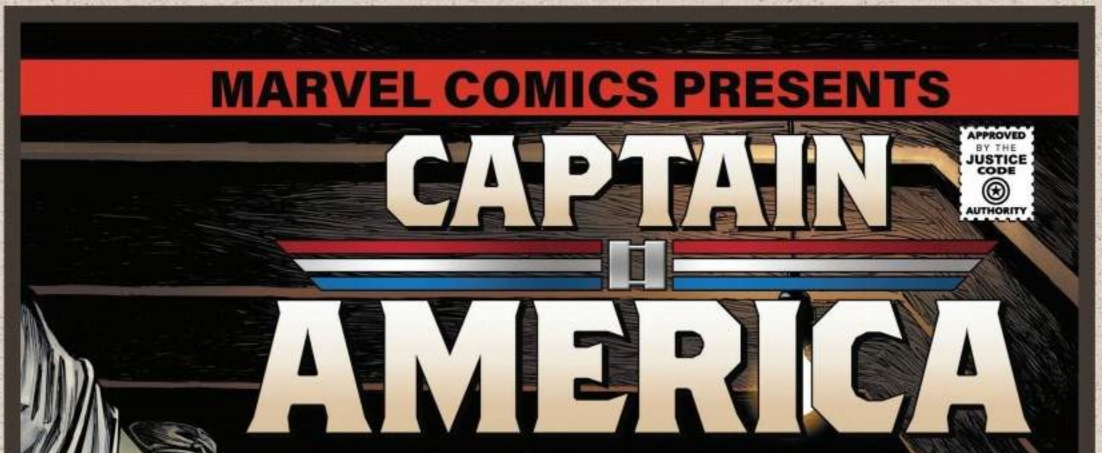
#10 PRIDE ALLIES VARIANT BY
BETSY COLA


SKOTTIE YOUNG 2024

#10 BIG MARVELS BLACK & WHITE VARIANT BY
SKOTTIE YOUNG



#10 BIG MARVELS VARIANT BY
SKOTTIE YOUNG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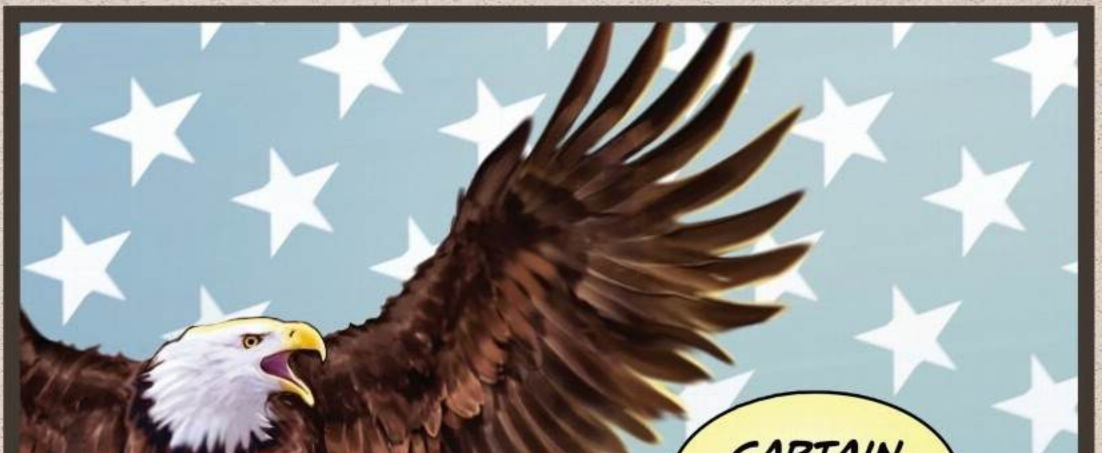
#11 MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS VARIANT BY
HUMBERTO RAMOS & **EDGAR DELGADO**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#11 DEADPOOL KILLS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE
VARIANT BY **DAVID NAKAYAMA**

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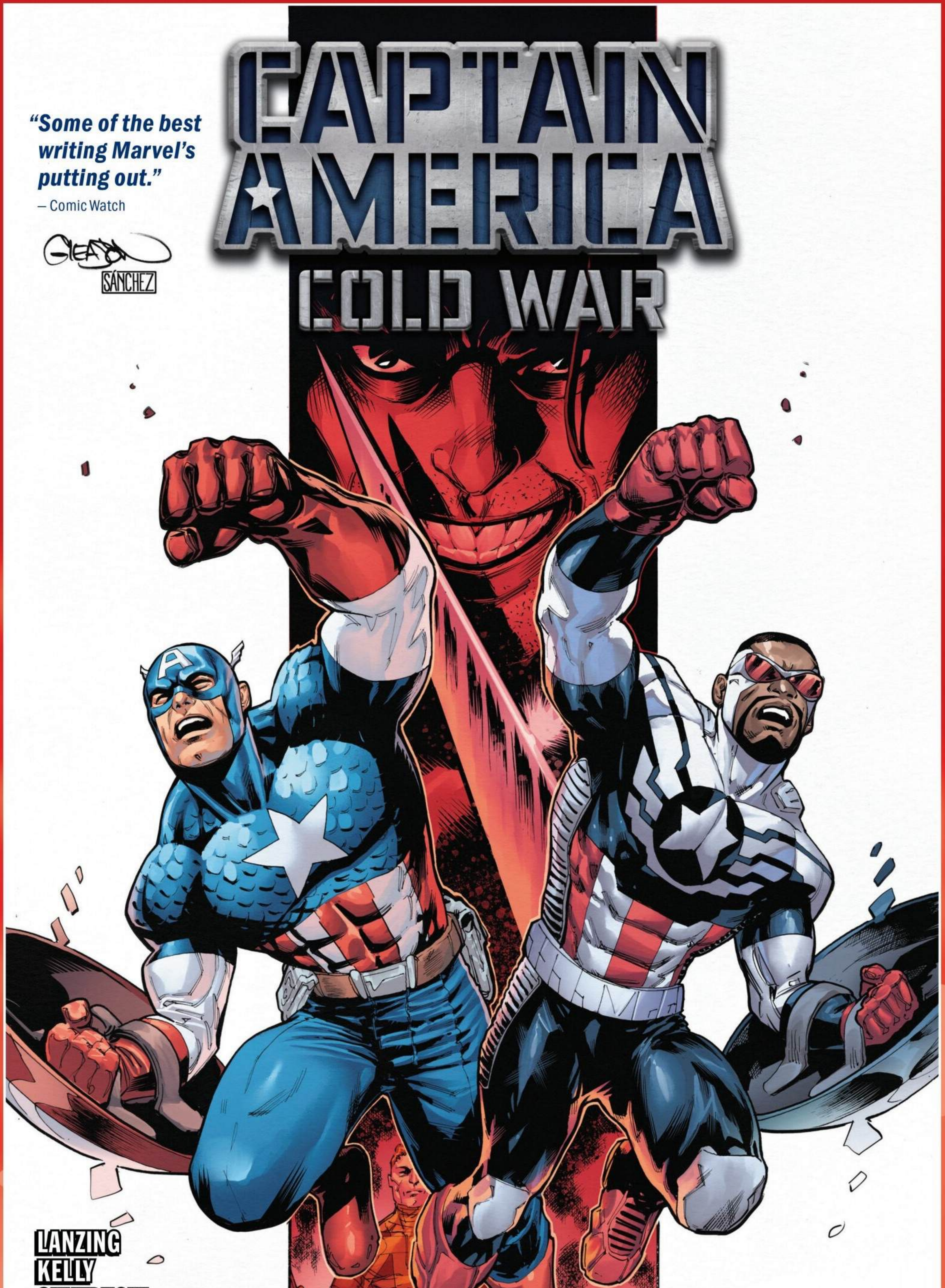
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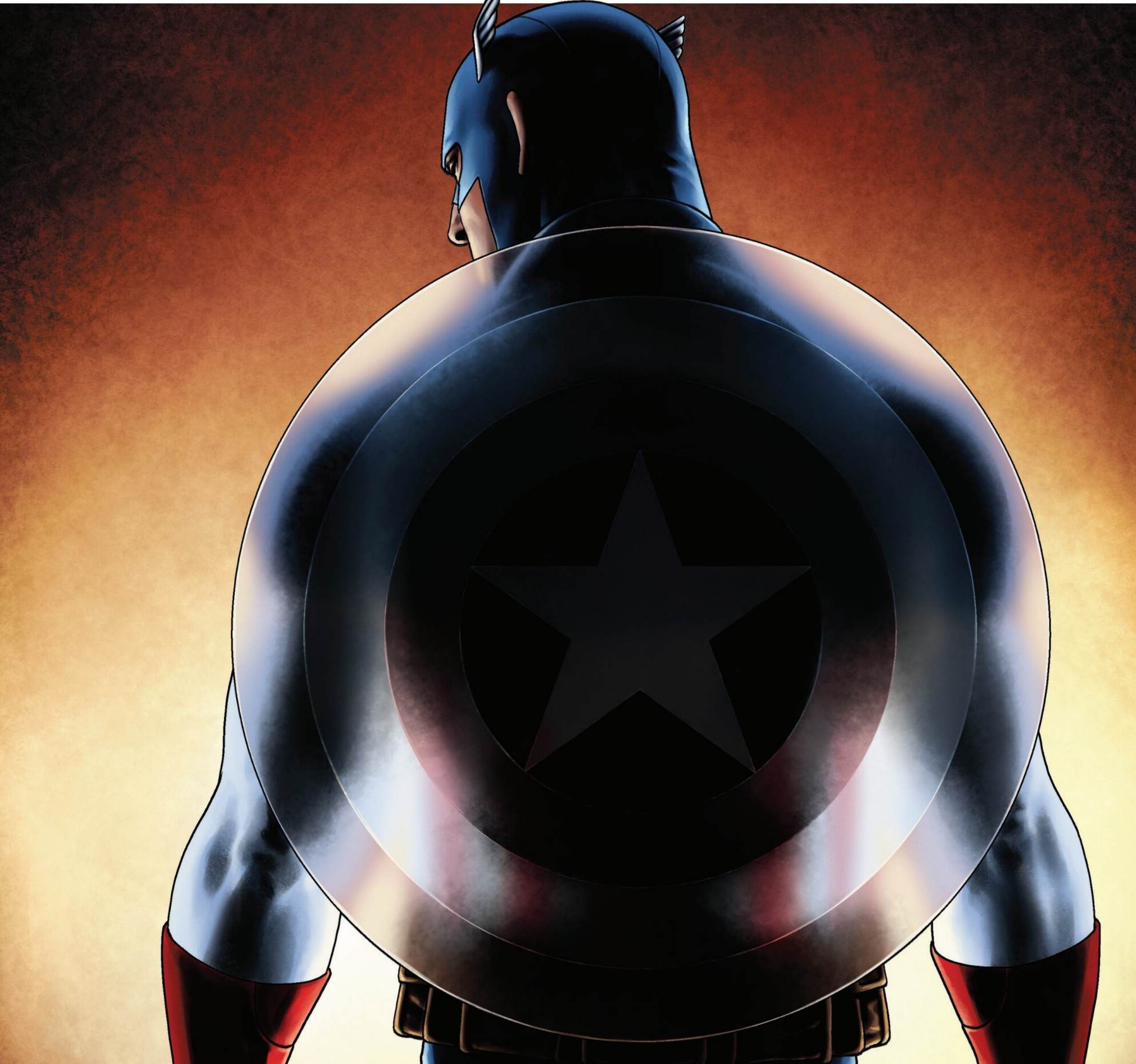

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